

THE FURTHEST FURY

CAROLYN
WELLS

Madys Elliott

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THE FURTHEST FURY

CAROLYN WELLS'

*Baffling detective stories, in which Fleming Stone,
the great American Detective, displays his re-
markable ingenuity for unravelling mysteries*

SPOOKY HOLLOW

FEATHERS LEFT AROUND

THE MYSTERY GIRL

THE MYSTERY OF THE
SYCAMORE

RASPBERRY JAM

THE DIAMOND PIN

VICKY VAN

THE MARK OF CAIN

THE CURVED BLADES

THE WHITE ALLEY

ANYBODY BUT ANNE

THE MAXWELL MYSTERY

A CHAIN OF EVIDENCE

THE CLUE

THE GOLD BAG

PTOMAIN STREET

A Rollicking Parody on a Famous Book

THE FURTHEST FURY

A FLEMING STONE STORY

BY
CAROLYN WELLS

Author of "Vicky Van," "Spooky Hollow," etc.




PHILADELPHIA AND LONDON
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TO MY DEAR FRIEND
SOPHIE MACKAY



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THE FURTHEST FURY

CHAPTER I

STANHOPE STARTS

WHEN David Stanhope entered the Grand Central Station and walked down the broad and beautiful stone steps, he went slowly, and his observant eyes browsed happily over the vast concourse and its undulating pageant of humanity. Orderly but restless lines stretched away from each ticket window, more bustling groups surrounded the information pagoda in the centre, and recurrent tides ebbed and flowed through the wide doorways.

He loved the scene and never tired of it, and as he reached the floor himself, and followed his own porter through the maelstrom, he noticed swiftly the faces and forms of those who passed him, and his retentive memory snapped and preserved many mental photographs.

He was happy because he was started on a restful and pleasant summer vacation which held all the elements of comfort and enjoyment that he liked best and none of the annoyance or boredom that he detested.

Not for him the big summer hotels, or the small summer boarding houses; not for him a camp or

cabin wherein to "rough it," or a pretentious bungalow with elaborate appointments for "the simple life."

His objective point was the home of an old friend, and his pursuits were to be entirely of his own election.

But Dave Stanhope was of the temperament that enjoys little things and finds pleasure in physical comfort or even the mere absence of physical discomfort.

So his pleasantly blue eyes beamed kindly on his fellow mortals as he strode through the gate and boarded the train that would take him up into the green hill country of Connecticut.

His striding through the gate was delayed, even impeded by a number of the more highly-favored sex, whom he allowed to precede him, at their own insistence, until his patience gave out and he stepped between two ladies, evidently cronies, who gave him scornful glances as he hurried ahead.

But Stanhope liked to board the train in time to get his impedimenta all in place before they left the station, and he watched with interest while the porter stowed away his bags and coat and reading matter in such wise as he directed.

Then, with a little grunt of satisfaction, he settled himself into the hollow of rather prickery mohair plush assigned to him, and closed his eyes for a moment in sheer joy of inaction.

He quickly opened them again, for though a tired business man off on a holiday, David Stanhope was always alert unless really asleep.

In the absence of anything else of interest, he noted his fellow passengers. There seemed to be mostly women at his end of the car, and two of them, he saw, were the two he had inadvertently separated as he came through the gate.

They were not sisters, he concluded, after a brief survey, but friends, perhaps office workers off for their own holiday. Next them sat an older woman, with a large, rather handsome face, and next her, a pretty young girl, not quite of the flapper type, but a modified version of it.

Not strangely, perhaps, Stanhope bent his attention on this girl, and concluded she was a college girl or very recent graduate, perhaps of the class of that very year. It was mid July now, and the girl, in smart togs, was evidently on pleasure bent.

She glanced round the car, favored Stanhope with a fleeting, impersonal inspection and after a few more wide-eyed contemplations of the women near her, she immersed herself in a book.

Now David Stanhope had one pet hallucination. He firmly believed that he was a born detective. Never had he had a chance to try himself out, but he was none the less sure of his ability.

Of course a perspicacious reader will see at once that this was a hallucination, for no real detective could have had an hallucination about anything. Mistakes they may make, wrong opinions they may hold, even mistaken theories they may put forth, but hallucinations cannot be theirs. For real, true, heaven-born detectives are logical, rational and mathematically accurate, and they realize their limitations.

Yet it was Stanhope's optimism and self-confidence that gave him his belief in his own powers, and optimism and self-confidence are good things for a detective, or anyone else, to possess.

So he looked happily about him, through the car, out of the windows, at the other passengers, but always his eyes came back to rest on the girl in the sport clothes.

Not bizarre or conspicuous clothes. Her frock was of tailored lines, with a cape of knitted wool and a saucy hat of some embroidered fabric, all of a soft shade of tan brown. The girl's hair and eyes were brown, too, which Stanhope concluded was the reason she had selected those clothes.

But his interest in the girl was purely artistic, for Stanhope was a confirmed widower of many years standing, and present-day young people appealed to him as little as he did to them.

Yet he was far from old. About forty-five or six, he looked younger, and, when interested, he had all the vivacity and enthusiasm of real youth.

Yet to the girl, in her earliest twenties, he appeared a man of her father's generation and so of no claim whatsoever to her attention.

Stanhope had a new detective novel with him, as well as a magazine of that same stimulating type of fiction, and he looked forward to a long, delightful train ride, reading them.

Yet first, he mused, he would give his detective instinct a bit of salutary exercise by trying to deduce from the appearance of those nearest him some facts about themselves which chance might enable him to verify.

He began with the girl.

"Rich and indulgent parents," he said to himself, noting her correct costume, worn with the air of one accustomed to fine raiment, and her plain yet expensive bag, vanity case and handkerchief.

"Not used to travelling alone," he added, as the conductor coming along just then, the girl grew quite flustered and flurried over the simple matter of her train ticket and Pullman ticket.

But that was as far as he could get. His deductive processes could not tell him whether she was going some place or coming home from it; whether she was happy or secretly miserable; whether she was earnest-souled or butterfly-minded.

He turned his attention to the older women nearby.

The good-looking matron had removed her hat, showing well dressed and tidy gray hair, that waved back from a high, rather intellectual looking brow.

She wore a gown of black taffeta, made without style or charm, but which seemed to suit her somewhat severe effect of dignity and reserve.

She met Stanhope's regard with an indifferent stare and dropped her eyes again to the large-sized magazine she held.

The other two women—and these four were all who came within his range of easy vision—were talking rapidly. So deep in conversation they were that both seemed to talk at once and their accompanying gestures were vivacious and continuous.

Without a qualm of conscience, Stanhope listened, but the incoherent babble gave him no clear idea of their subject.

He heard such scraps as "And so then I decided—" or "Yes, she always was like that—" but they gave him no information.

These women were intensely alive and alert, wrapped up in themselves and their own interests, and they vouchsafed no glance to the man opposite or the other women beside them.

He glanced at their faces. Intelligent, quick-witted they were, yet commonplace, he decided, as he noticed their unespecial black leather handbags and the newspapers they had chosen from the trainboy.

But, he confided to himself, after his inspection, detectives don't care much about the traits of everyday women or pretty young girls. It's criminal tendencies we ought to look for, and who could expect to find any in a bunch of women?

So he made for the smoking-car, found a satisfactory seat, and after a half hour's discreet searching of physiognomies had discovered, at least, to his own conviction, two pickpockets, a potential murderer and a man whose chief diversion, he felt sure, was arson.

So you see how far David Stanhope was carried by his optimism and self-assurance.

He returned to his Pullman in time to assist the deft porter in his arduous labors of getting him ready to detrain.

In the gathering up of his bits of hand luggage, his reading matter and his golf bag, Stanhope found time to note his opposite neighbors, and was duly regretful, though not disconsolate, when he found that the pretty girl staid on the train, while the three older women got off at his own station stop.

He fell back, giving the ladies full use of the aisle, and his eyes fell on a magazine that had been left behind. Not forgotten, for it was thrown carelessly on the floor. But as it chanced, it was a number that Stanhope wanted, and uncertain as to getting

another, he hesitated only an instant and then picked it up and tucked it under his arm.

The girl, noticing, smiled a little at what she thought was culpable theft, but Stanhope didn't see the smile and wouldn't have cared a straw if he had.

New Midian was the name on the signboard of the little railway station, and in another moment Stanhope's hand was grasped by his host and a chauffeur was taking his bags and things.

"Hello, hello, old chap," came the hearty voice of Amos Hazelton. "You're looking fit, I'll vow!" Hop in the car—one or two errands in the village and then for Hazel Hill. Glad to see you—mighty glad!"

The few small errands attended to, Hazelton said to his chauffeur, "Drive along toward the Golf Club, and pick up Mr. Bark, when you see him."

Stanhope sensed a note of annoyance in the other's voice, and said at once, "what's the boy up to now?"

"Oh, another girl!" said the father, impatiently. "And serious this time. Barker's a born gallant, but he never picks the right kind of a sweetheart—"

"From your point of view!" laughed Stanhope. "Don't be too hard on him, Amos, he's too young to settle down to one, yet."

"That's just what I tell him—but headstrong cuss that he is—here he comes now, girl and all!"

Stanhope saw young Hazelton, tall, strong, hand-

some, and a sweet, pretty little scrap of femininity of the rosebud type, who looked scared to death at the appearance of the Hazelton car.

"Get in, Barker," ordered his father.

"And we'll set Gladys down as we pass," said the young man, handing the lovely maiden into the car.

The two sat in the chairs in front of the older men, and Stanhope looked admiringly at the little blonde, bobbed head, that seemed to gravitate naturally toward the stalwart form beside her.

Amos Hazelton frowned, he looked toward Stanhope and scowled, but he said no word.

"Your Sweet Auburn of a village is as lovely as ever," Stanhope said, admiringly, as they swept past the beautiful elm-shaded green that was the long centre of the town.

"Yes," Hazelton always warmed to this subject; "yes, several improvements this year. You haven't been here for three years, you old scoundrel! you'll see several changes."

"More people, too," and Stanhope glanced at the frequent groups strolling along the village sidewalks, that ran either side of the green.

"Yes, more's the pity. But we've some newcomers who are real acquisitions. Martin, turn, and go past the Lawrence cottage."

"That," he said, as his chauffeur obeyed and

turned into a side road that was really little more than a flowery lane, "that's where Nevin Lawrence lives, with his sister. He's the author, you know. We never had a celebrity here before."

"Not so very celebrated," laughed Stanhope, "I never heard of him."

"Oh, you must have. He writes for the *Carnival*, that big story paper."

"I read that occasionally, I have one here with me—but I don't remember his name."

"He's in it once in a while—good yarns, too. Next to the Gray place, you see—"

"But the Gray place is all built over! Quite pretentious—"

"Oh, yes. Used to be the Gray Bungalow, you remember—now, its Gray Porches, if you please!"

"Good name, too," and Stanhope looked admiringly at the big, rambling house with many porches on all sides, and all painted a fresh, smart gray.

"Fine boarding house—the best people come up here to it. Ben Gray always knew how to run a boarding house, and his ideas and plans have grown with experience until now his is the show place of the county among the Inns."

Passing these houses they came to a pretty white cottage, where the car stopped and young Hazelton sprang down to assist the little blonde beauty out.

A few whispered words of farewell passed be-

tween the two young people, the girl went through the gate that Barker Hazelton held open for her, and then the youth returned to the car and sat in moody silence.

"Chirk up, son, and chatter to Dave Stanhope," said Hazelton, with an air of would-be gayety.

"You might at least have said good evening to Gladys," the boy blurted out, sullenly, and ignoring his father's speech.

"Didn't want to," the older man returned. "I don't approve of her, Bark, and you know it."

"You don't approve of anything or anybody that I like!" and Barker looked around belligerently.

"There, there," said Stanhope, "don't quarrel before me! What's this place, the new Club house?"

"Yes, isn't it a dandy!" and father and son were at one again as they extolled the merits of the new and beautiful building.

"Can't stop now," Hazelton said, "too near dinner time, but to-morrow you shall have a sight of the place, inside and out. It's just about all right."

Amos Hazelton's household consisted further of a wife and daughter who were just now up in the White Mountains. This was part of the summer routine, and Stanhope oftener than not, timed his visits to take advantage of the absence of the ladies.

Delightful people both, he thought them, but he and Amos were old friends, and Amos's wife was a

bit exacting, and so, it seemed best all round to visit Hazel Hill when its mistress was elsewhere.

So well established had this habit become that it caused no comment, and though the previous two years Stanhope's visit had been omitted because the Hazeltons had gone abroad, this summer the old conditions prevailed and so the habit was resumed.

"Everything is better and finer and handsomer," said the guest appreciatively, as they drove in at the gateway of Hazel Hill.

"Two or three years make a difference in any country place," returned Amos, and then they went into the house.

The great comfortable home, and the easy informality, owing to the absence of the ladies, went to make up an atmosphere after Stanhope's own heart, and after a leisurely toilet he went down to find his host awaiting him in the living room.

A sociable cocktail was served, and Stanhope noticed that while the father sipped one, apparently as a matter of convention, the son indulged in two with every appearance of avid enjoyment.

Dinner was a pleasant and affable affair, and afterward, Barker excused himself and went down to the village for the evening, leaving the two old chums tête-à-tête on the veranda.

"What about the boy?" said Stanhope, almost before his footsteps had passed beyond hearing.

"Lots of things," and Amos Hazelton turned to his friend with a sober face.

"First, the girl!"

"Oh, first, last and all the time, the girl—that one, or another, Bark always has a girl. But usually they're all-right girls—daughters of our friends or acquaintances."

"And this one?" prompted Stanhope, helpfully.

"This one—her name is Gladys Lee—is a daughter of the village dressmaker—"

"Respectable?"

"Oh, yes—that. But this time Barker's got marriage in his head and she's not the one for that."

"Pretty little thing—"

"In a cheap way—"

"Oh, come now, Amos, not a cheap way. Frivolous-looking, maybe, lightweight brain—but cheap isn't the word."

"I don't care what the word is, I don't propose my son shall marry the daughter of the village sewing woman."

"Don't be snobbish—"

"It isn't snobbery, but Barker is my only boy. He'll carry on my business, inherit my estate, and he must have a wife that can do him credit."

"How does Mrs. Hazelton feel about it?"

"Just as I do."

"Oh, well, it may blow over."

"That's what we hope. Now, here's another and a worse trouble. Barker is not too fond of wine, it isn't that, but he has some obstinate notions—"

"I saw him lap up two cocktails—"

"No, it isn't that, I tell you. He never takes a drop too much. But—the new clubhouse management has never allowed drinking—"

"How could it with prohibition? "

"I mean, it hasn't allowed the members to bring their own—not even a flask, or anything. And we older members want to keep it so. Well, there's an election impending—president, you see—and it all depends on who's elected whether we can keep the old laws or not."

"I see. And Barker wants the wet president."

"Yes, and I'm for the dry one. Now, the dry one is Nevin Lawrence, the writer chap, you know. He's a fine man, he'd make the best possible president, but he wants the club absolutely dry. Barker adores Lawrence, but he can't stand for the dry plank, so he—"

"Who's the other candidate—the wet one? "

Hazelton gave a queer little wry smile. "Barker himself," he said.

"That kid! "

"Well, you see, Bark isn't such an awful kid. He's twenty-six. And they want young blood. But I don't want him to run against Lawrence, and I

don't want to see the club go to the dogs. I may be an old foggy, and all that—"

"No, Amos, you're right. Tell me more about this Lawrence. You say Barker likes him?"

"Everybody likes him. He came here two years ago, with his sister, one of the sweetest women in the world. She and Mrs. Hazelton are dear friends. She's a widow—husband killed in the war. Lawrence is a widower and the brother and sister have a pretty cottage—you saw it—next door to Gray Porches."

"Yes, I remember."

"The Grays swear by Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre—that's his sister. Why the whole village swears by them. They're the best people we have here by all odds. And, of course, Lawrence is the very man for president of the club. Wise, just, capable, and a celebrated author beside. Barker would be a silly president! He's my own son and I love him, but he hasn't any one single requisite that a president ought to have. Aside from all question of wet or dry, Barker is too immature, too inexperienced for a club president. Twenty-six isn't so young, but Barker is a headstrong, inconsequent sort, and he'd raise hob with that club!"

"I believe you," said Stanhope. "What are you going to do about it?"

"I don't know. The election comes off next

week, I haven't a doubt but Lawrence will get it over Barker's head, but I'm afraid he won't."

"Oh, of course he will, it'll all be right. I should say the girl complication is really worse than the golf one."

"Maybe. I don't know. The boy is a care to me, I can't deny that."

"Is this Lawrence really much of a celebrity?"

"Perhaps not that. But he's a very popular writer. He has a story in the magazine every once in a while, and he's beginning to be talked about."

"A serial story?"

"No, short stories. But mighty good ones."

"Is he—er, cocky?"

"Not a bit. Simple and pleasant—a fine, all round man. And his sister, Mrs. Sayre, is loved by every woman in the village."

"And the men?"

"They all admire and respect her. Oh, she isn't the flirtatious sort. She's a woman of thirty, I suppose, and she chums with the women mostly. She and her brother are devoted to each other, and they are both literary."

"Does she write?"

"No, some say she helps him, but I don't know about that. She's just a real lady, a fine, pleasant lady. Mrs. Hazelton and Millicent adore her."

“And the little blonde Gladys—does she like her?”

“Why, I don’t know—I suppose so. But she’d like whoever or whatever Barker likes, and outside of this foolish club business, Bark likes Lawrence and his sister, both very much.”

And then, somehow, the conversation drifted to more personal subjects, and the two men talked over old times and reminiscences of their college days together until, though it was not late, Stanhope declared he was ready for bed.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAGEDY

STANHOPE gave a sigh of content and satisfaction as he reached the pleasant rooms always allotted to him during his visits at Hazel Hill.

Everything was in order for his comfort, and after a little further arranging of his personal belongings, Stanhope sat down by his reading table for a solitary smoke.

He picked up first the magazine he had acquired on the train. It was the *Carnival*, and he had taken it to himself because he knew it contained an article on Auction Bridge that he wanted to read; and he was now further interested, because he wanted to look over the story by Nevin Lawrence.

He hardly expected to read the story through, but he found his attention caught after a paragraph or two, and read on absorbedly to the end.

"A good writer," he said to himself. "Clear headed and of an assured style. Must have travelled a bit—seems well informed on Antiquities, especially Grecian art. The way he handles Tanagra figurines proves first-hand acquaintance with them, not merely a study of the Boston Museum collection. I'll be glad to meet that chap—and he certainly would seem a bet-

ter man for a club president than an addle-pated kid of twenty-six!"

Stanhope rose and went out on a little balcony that opened from his sitting room, to finish his smoke outside.

He was in his element, for he had a touch of the Sybarite in his make-up, and the wicker lounging-chair, with a soft rug thrown over it, proved a comfortable nest from which to gaze over the moonlighted landscape.

It was about midnight, and the early August moon was at its full. Obscured now and then by a passing cloud, for the most part it shone with nearly daytime brightness, and Stanhope gazed his fill over the green scenery of the foreground and the black darkness of the distant hills.

Hazel Hill, itself only a slight elevation, was nearly a mile from the village, where only a few lights twinkled at this hour. The villagers were of simple habits, and most of the city people summering there also kept early hours. The white spires of three churches showed among the clustering trees, and the stone tower of the Public Library could be dimly seen.

A long black oval was, Stanhope knew, the village green, but the houses on either side were hidden in the trees.

His mind wandered back over the day. And from

his subconsciousness emerged a mental picture of a man he had seen on the train. A man of no peculiarity of appearance except his white face. It seemed to Stanhope that he never had seen so white a face on a living being.

Yet it was not from fear or any emotion that the man's countenance was blanched.

The whole incident now returned vividly to Stanhope's mind. He had just settled himself finally in his Pullman chair, when he chanced to lift his eyes and saw, just coming in the door, this man, a quiet, ordinary looking citizen, who stopped short as soon as he was fairly inside the car, gazed ahead of him for a moment, regarding Stanhope himself impassively and then, turning, left the car again. He showed no haste, no recognition of Stanhope or anyone else, he just came in and went out. Probably he discovered he was in the wrong car—or perhaps he was not entitled to a Pullman seat at all. But in any case, Stanhope had a distinct recollection of that intensely white face, and he pondered over it.

“Consumptive, I suppose,” he thought; “yet it wasn't exactly the pallor of illness—more like a freak of nature in giving anyone such a curiously white skin. Good looking chap in his way—rather fine features, but a nervous, twitchy air—must have been an invalid—coming up this way for mountain air, likely as not.”

Then the thinker's mind drifted to later memories—of the village as they passed through it in the motor, of the fine effect of the rebuilt Gray Porches—why did people choose such pretentious and absurd names! of the cottage where the author-man lived, of the cottage where little Gladys lived, and then paused for a time on the glimpse he had had of Love's Young Dream.

Barker Hazelton, twenty-six, and in love with the dressmaker's daughter. He realized how it would chagrin Amos Hazelton and his wife, but personally Stanhope felt he wouldn't care a rap if his son married a sewing woman's child so long as she was as sweet and dear as that little girl.

He had scarcely heard her speak a dozen words, but her pure, fine face was to him enough guaranty of her desirability.

Well, he would look into all that in the morning; would also get more data as to the business of the golf club presidential election, and use his superior intellect and his infallible judgment and wisdom in adjusting matters and advising his friends, the two Hazelton men.

He put away troublous questions and basked in the moonlight, his whole sensuous nature enthralled by the scenes and sounds and fragrances of the enchanted night. He loved the dank coolness that came from a nearby grove of hemlocks and spruces;

the wafts of perfume from the nearer gardens, and the spell of glamour thrown over it all by the round golden moon.

But when he found himself murmuring "Lap me in soft Lydian airs," he laughed at himself for a maudlin idiot and ordered himself to bed.

Undisturbed by Stanhope's defection, the moon pursued her course across the cloud-sprinkled heavens, and she had scarcely neared the western horizon when the sun, following the same route, began the day's journey.

A few of the inhabitants of New Midian were up before the sun was, but not many. Only farmers and milkmen and such workers as could not consult their own pleasure.

The pretty village was quiet, placid and serene, the white houses and the green shutters unmoving and motionless as they accepted the kisses of the intrepid sun.

And then the day began. One front door after another was flung wide. One window shade after another was rolled up. Smoke came from the chimneys, dogs began their joyous barking and baker's carts moved along the roads.

Practically speaking, there were no streets. The road each side of the Green was the residential section, though from it two or three side lanes branched forth. One of these contained the tradesmen's shops

or markets, and another was the one on which stood the rambling, much-added-to structure now known as Gray Porches.

The cottage Nevin Lawrence lived in was next to this, but was perhaps three hundred feet distant, and between the two, but much farther back from the road than either, was the cottage of Miss Lizzie Busby, far better known by her nickname of Busybody Busby.

As an astute reader may surmise, this was because of a certain feeling of intense interest in the affairs and doings of her fellow mortals and unceasing efforts to gratify that interest.

Miss Busby was a music teacher, and report had it that she didn't need the money, but pursued that calling because of the insight it gained for her into other people's homes.

So, on this fine morning, Miss Busby opened her front door and stood out on her tiny front porch to follow the example of a certain renowned lawgiver, and view the country o'er.

She had a good view, too, for her house, though far back from the street was on a slight eminence which gave a satisfying command of the doings at Gray Porches and a fair knowledge of events at the Woodbine, as Lawrence's cottage was called.

At the larger house, Busybody Busby could see the maids spreading breakfast tables on the verandas,

adjusting awnings, and taking rolls from the baker's boy.

Not very thrilling this, but there had been some new boarders arriving last night, and Busybody was alert to watch for their appearance.

Woodbine cottage looked as usual, the well-behaved, smoke issuing from the chimney in true spirals, and Emma Lily, the capable housekeeper, appearing now and then at the back door, on breakfast matters intent.

Satisfied generally, Miss Busby sniffed the air, stepped down to look at the geranium bed, and then repaired to her own breakfast table, which she laid and furnished herself, and which stood near a window commanding a gorgeous view of both houses.

Up to date was Miss Busby and enjoyed her electric coffee pot and toaster, while awaiting any moving picture of humanity that might unroll before her eyes.

This morning she seemed a bit preoccupied. She poured out her coffee and buttered her toast with an air of abstraction and three times during the performance she rose and stood again in her front doorway for a moment.

The guests were taking their places at the tables on the boarding house verandas and were saying to one another how delightful it was to breakfast out of doors in this fine August weather.

At the cottage, Emma Lily was sitting on the

back steps, idly twisting her apron corners, yet with an air of alert expectancy.

Miss Busby easily read this to mean that breakfast was all prepared, but the family had not yet come down stairs.

Another glance at Gray Porches and she went back to her coffee.

Ben Gray and his also experienced wife were versed in the psychology of boarders, though they would not have used that word to designate the fruit of their many years' experience.

But they had found out that a wholesome, well cooked simple breakfast took on a hundred per cent. added charm if served on a vine-clad veranda, at small and carefully appointed tables.

And as this principle was the keynote of their whole ménage it was not surprising that they always had their rooms filled, and that accommodations were booked months and even years ahead.

The newcomers, six of them, were put at one table, and the waitresses heard anew the exclamations and enthusiastic praises of the place and the conditions.

The new arrivals numbered among them the three ladies who came up on the train with Stanhope, and a middle aged pair from Boston with their intellectual daughter.

The Boston family, Endicotts, it being their second summer there—at once assumed an air of proprietorship in the table, and learning the names of the others, assured Mrs. Trent, the oldest, of their willingness to help and advise regarding walks, drives and such matters. To the other two, Miss Lowe and Miss Hemingway, Mr. Endicott offered the intelligent companionship of his daughter, and though the New York women were not entirely overcome by the honor of Endicott attention, they graciously responded and the new table-full of people promptly became a sort of family affair, as did all the tables on the Gray Porches.

“New Midian is a beautiful village,” said Lura Endicott, with the air of issuing an ultimatum, “and it is picturesque, too, but to me its greatest charm is its air of peacefulness and courteous calm.”

“One does notice that,” agreed Mrs. Trent, glancing out on the shade street, and letting her gaze stray to the two nearby houses. “Who lives in that white house, back from the road?”

“Miss Busby,” Mr. Endicott replied, and began to remark upon that well-known and estimable lady’s characteristics.

“She’s ubiquitous,” he said, smiling, “you’ll see her everywhere—there she is now—” for at that moment Lizzie Busby made a trip to her front porch.

But as the quiet and calm of Pompeii before the eruption of Vesuvius, as the quiet and calm of Sodom and Gomorrah before their destruction, as the quiet and calm of San Francisco before the earthquake, so was the peace and happiness of New Midian about to be jarred to its foundations by a tremendous shock.

Even as Miss Busby stepped out of her front door into the morning sunlight, a running, shrieking figure appeared from the door of the Woodbine cottage, and fled blindly, stumblingly across the lawns toward Gray Porches.

Screaming inarticulate sounds, waving her arms frantically, Emma Lily, the servant of Nevin Lawrence's house came nearer until the Gray's boarders could see her white face, working in a very convulsion of agony and terror.

"What can be the matter?" cried Mr. Endicott, starting from his seat. But Ben Gray was before him and ran down the steps to meet the hysterical woman.

"They're dead—they're killed!" she shrieked, clutching at the sleeve of Ben Gray. "Come over, come right over—"

Taking her by the arm, he strode along by her side and said no word as she babbled on:

"Killed—dead—oh, my soul; what does it mean!"

"Both of whom?" said Gray, in dazed tones,

though he had no doubt she meant Nevin Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre.

“Yes, murdered in their beds—oh, hurry!”

“Be quiet, Emma Lily. If you can’t be quiet, at least, be as quiet as you can. Oh, here *you* are, Miss Busby!” for running true to form, Busybody was close at their heels. “Now, don’t ask a question, just take care of this woman and make her shut up her howling, while I go in and investigate.”

Gray was already at the door and burst into the house and up the stairs.

As owner of the house, Gray was familiar with the rooms, and as he paused at the open door of the first bedroom, he saw a still figure stretched on the floor. A woman’s figure, clad in a nightdress and a yellow silk kimono. She lay on her side in a crumpled heap, just inside the door. Her arms were flung above her head and forward, as if she were reaching for something.

Gray stooped and saw at once she had been shot through the heart, evidently as she was about to cross her threshold. It was Mrs. Sayre, and with a gaze of pity and wonder, Gray went on to the room of Nevin Lawrence.

“Both of them,” the maid had said, and truly, for a second tragedy met his eyes.

Lawrence’s body lay on his bed, contorted, as if he had died in a spasm of mortal agony.

Ben Gray was overcome; strong, phlegmatic nature though he was, these two shocking sights completely unnerved him and he ran downstairs and out into the air. The two women were on the porch, Emma Lily hysterical and garrulous and Miss Busby alertly curious and receptive.

"They're dead—both of them," Gray said, excitedly. "Don't go up there, anybody—we must keep everything clear for the detectives—it's murder, you see. But I think I'd ought to call a doctor first—gee, I never was mixed up in anything like this before!"

One of the most experienced of the New Midian citizens, Ben Gray was up against a new proposition. He was honestly anxious to do his duty, but except in a general way he was ignorant of what he should do first.

He strode back into the living room of the cottage and telephoned Doctor Duncan, who promised to come at once.

"Whew!" Gray said, wiping his forehead, "I can't seem to think! First off, I knew I must send for a doctor, and now I've got to go back and tell my folks. The women'll go plumb crazy! And I'm so sorry—but it don't seem right to take time for that now—who could have killed that fine man? And his sister! such a sweet, gentle lady—look here, Emma Lily, what do you know about this?"

“Nothing, nothing, Mr. Gray. I got the breakfast as usual, and when they didn’t come down—and *didn’t* come down, why, I went up—and I just only glimpsed ’em, and I ran out for you or somebody. It was too much for me to bear alone—” she broke off sobbing.

“I should say so,” and Lizzie Busby put a soothing arm round her. “You come along home with me, Emma Lily—”

“No,” countermanded Gray. “You stay right here, Emma Lily. You needn’t go upstairs, but you lock up the back of the house good, and you stay here in the front hall and don’t you let a soul in except the doctor when he comes, and then the police or whoever he sends for.”

“The police!” cried the two women at once.

“Sure! This here is murder in the first degree! I know about these things, and I know we gotta keep the rabble out. Now, mind, don’t you let anybody in, no neighbors or no curious prying peepers. Of course, Constable Clary, if he gets here before Doc. Duncan, which he’s quite likely to do. My, how’ll I tell all my people?”

Overburdened with his responsibilities, Ben Gray went back to Gray Porches and addressed the groups still breakfasting on his verandas.

“A terrible thing has occurred next door,” he said, simply, his sorrowful eyes roving from one face

to another, as the guests turned to look at him. "Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre have both been killed—murdered—don't ask me any questions, for that's all I know. I have sent for Doctor Duncan, and he will bring the constable and they will take charge. You all know these dear people," his voice choked a little, "except maybe, you who only arrived here yesterday afternoon. To you," he turned to the table of the newest guests, "I will say that Mr. Lawrence was one of our most looked up to citizens and his sister, Mrs. Sayre, one of the gentlest and most courteous ladies in our village society. I—I can't say any more—" and with a sudden gasp of emotion, Gray went into the house.

Now the summer boarders, at the best run and finest named boarding houses, are not all and always entirely above the vulgar vice of curiosity, and several of those at Gray Porches couldn't resist the impulse to stroll over toward Woodbine cottage. They would have made for the Busby house, but Ben Gray had said that Miss Busby was with Emma Lily; the latter always well known as a "character" and now elevated to the position of a heroine.

Only the older habitués of Gray Porches took this course, the newer ones and those not well acquainted with the victims of the tragedy, remaining on the porches, and secretly angling for the rocking

chairs that commanded the best view of impending events.

"I think we would better go right home at once," Mr. Endicott informed his wife, but so absorbed was she in watching the arrival of two cars that came swiftly to the Woodbine cottage that she made no reply.

The cars brought the doctor and the constable, and they went into the cottage and forbade anyone else to enter unless summoned.

But in less than five minutes they called Emma Lily to their aid.

"What do you know about all this?" the constable said, glaring at her through his glasses.

Zeb Clary, like many another village constable, was the victim of greatness thrust upon him. He was no more fit to be a constable than any of his fellow citizens, but at least he was equally fit. He had shrewd common sense and fair judgment, and few in New Midian had more.

But of experience in these matters he had none, and he deemed the proper procedure with a witness, especially a woman witness, was to intimidate.

"Come now, what do you know about it all?" he repeated, and his brusque, even rude manner roused Emma Lily's ire.

"I don't know nothing about it," she declared, quite undaunted by his menacing glances. "I waited

breakfast so long that I got werrited, and as I couldn't seem to make 'em hear by ringing a bell or by calling—I came up here—”

“Why did you come up? Did you know they were dead?”

“Listen at the man! Course I didn't know they were dead—how could I? But when they wouldn't answer my yelling and screaming, why, naturally I came up here. Good land, Zeb Clary, don't stand there making up fool questions! Get busy. Do something—”

“All necessary will be done, Emma Lily,” Doctor Duncan put in mildly; “what Mr. Clary wants to know, and I do, too, is how you found them. Just as they are now?”

“Sure, just as they are now—you don't suppose I moved 'em, do you?”

“Then it looks as if Mr. Lawrence had been shot first, while asleep in bed, and that Mrs. Sayre, hearing the shot, had run from her room, and had herself been killed as she reached the doorway.”

“Shot, was they?” asked Emma Lily, in an awestruck voice. “Who did it?”

“We don't know. Have you any idea?”

“Land, no. Where's the pistol?”

“We can't find any—”

“See here, Doc.,” Clary broke in, “that ain't

the way to go about it. This here woman is a witness—what we want is her story.”

“ Oh, she hasn’t any story to tell, have you, Emma Lily? Did you hear any shots in the night? ”

“ Land, no! I’d a been scared to death myself if I had.”

“ Where do you sleep? ”

“ In the extension—the wing. It’s all shut off from this part of the house. They might fire a volley in here and I’d never know it.”

“ Both were shot at very close range,” the doctor went on, making notes as he talked. “ Both were killed, probably, near the same time. I should say death took place about six or eight hours ago. It’s difficult to tell more exactly. As I see it, Mr. Lawrence was awakened by someone in his room, probably a burglar—I daresay he has some valuables—and killed before he could even get out of bed. Then, Mrs. Sayre, hearing her brother’s cries, rose from her bed, flung on her dressing gown and started to his aid, when she was met by the man and shot also. It may be she was killed only to prevent her revelation of the criminal.”

“ Yes, yes,” agreed Clary, “ that’s just as I see it. The dastardly villian done for ’em both and then made a getaway. Anything missing, Emma Lily? ”

“ I haven’t looked about yet—somehow, I can’t

feel to go messin' round among their things. Must I? "

" Well, it's gotta be done, sooner or later," Clary stated, looking judicially at her, " and, you see, nobody knows any more about their belongings than you do, most likely. Jewelry, now, hey? "

" They didn't have so very much," the woman replied; " Mr. Lawrence, now he had a pearl tie pin—I don't see it," she added, after a hasty glance among the appointments on the dresser.

" A real pearl? "

" Yes, and a fine one, I've heard him say. Anyways, it's gone. He always stuck it in this here little round cushion, and it ain't here now."

CHAPTER III

THE TANAGRA

THE Rocking Chair Phalanx at Gray Porches massed itself on the veranda that faced the Woodbine cottage and breathlessly watched the proceedings. And they were kept busy, for arrivals were continuous and each newcomer seemed worthy of note and comment.

"There's Coroner Fraser," announced Mrs. Appleby, who as one of the older "regulars" had the best rocking chair and the most advantageous position, "and Sheriff Rankin with 'im! Well, they're two tip-top men, and I rather guess something 'll be doing now. You see, Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Trent," for she had annexed these two newcomers with a shrewd eye to their possible social importance, "I know everybody up here, and I can tell you."

The others were duly grateful, and listened to their informant, while watching with eager eyes the strange scenes before them.

Neighbors had gathered, of course, and the Woodbine porch overflowed with curious humanity. Also people from more distant homes were arriving. Country people who had been marketing in the village, aristocrats from the Hill section, in their big

cars, children on their way to school, delivery boys, all sorts and conditions of men had paused at the pretty white house, and stood in groups, wondering and asking questions.

"Looks like an auction, 'ceptin' they ain't no red flag," said one of the Gray's waitresses, for the great occasion had more or less broken down the barriers of convention.

"Seems 'sif I must go over there," and Mrs. Appleby half rose, but fell back again as Mrs. Gray advised her to stay where she was.

"Better not, Mrs. Appleby, they won't let you go into the house, I know, and you can see everything from here."

Sarah Gray was right, no one was allowed inside the house, but the authorities. County Sheriff Rankin was a capable man, and in this case, he had hurried over from his home in a nearby town, not willing to trust a matter of such importance to his deputies.

"Bad business, Fraser," he said to the Coroner, as they started their examination of the premises.

"Righto," returned Fraser, a sharp alert chap of few words, and those usually slangy.

"And whoever killed these people did it mighty cleverly," Rankin went on; "so far I've seen no clues."

"Smart Aleck, sure," agreed Fraser, who was

darting about the rooms on the upper floor. "No footprints, no fingerprints—"

"Oh, you can't be sure of that yet. But one thing is certain, they both put up a stiff fight for their lives."

"I'll say that," put in Doctor Duncan, who was silently looking on. "Lawrence's attitude is that of one who was shot just as he prepared to make a lunge at his assailant."

"Yep, keeled straight over back," assented Fraser.

"And as to Mrs. Sayre," the doctor went on, "she fairly fought like a tiger! Her outstretched arms, and her tensed muscles show it, as well as the fact that her silk robe is torn and her hair disordered. Strange nobody heard anything."

"Maybe they did," said Rankin. "We haven't begun to question people yet."

"And that's what we'd better be up to," said Fraser. "Gawpin' around here ain't going to help much."

"Hello, Fraser, may I come up?" called a voice from the stairs, and some well brushed dark hair and a pair of blue eyes appeared in view.

"That you, Stanhope, where'd you drop from? Yes, come along up. You know Doc Duncan and old man Rankin, don't you? Now, give us the benefit of your gigantic on this matter."

Dave Stanhope, who had heard the news at the

post office, came up and shuddered as he saw the dreadful details of the scene.

His quick eyes turned from the pitiful, still figures and took in the rooms and furnishings.

The two largest and best bedrooms were those occupied by the unfortunate victims of the tragedy.

On either side of the house, each had its own bathroom and each was quite evidently furnished with a care to the tastes of its occupant.

Mrs. Sayre's room was decorated in tones of Jonquil yellow, which with white painted woodwork and furniture made a soft, cool looking effect. The chintzes were harmonious and the latticed windows were draped with yellow chiffon curtains with tiny ruffles, which blew in and out like shimmering veils. The dressing table was elaborately appointed and well kept, with a spray of small yellow roses in a Venetian glass vase for decoration.

In a bay window was a sewing table and a low rocker, and the window seat was piled with lacy pillows.

Everything betokened quiet good taste, and showed beside an individual charm that reflected the character of the woman who had planned it all.

And that woman lay, a dreadful sight, with torn kimono, disordered hair and crimson stained night dress, her features drawn in fear and anger, her

arms stretched to full length toward the corner of the wall near which she lay.

Reverently, yet with intense interest, Stanhope turned back to this figure.

"She fought bravely," he said; "see, where she backed against the door—"

"What? How do you know that?" cried Rankin.

"Look at that," and Stanhope pointed to a few scratches on the white enameled paint of the door that gave into the hall. They were at the height of his shoulder and as he pointed to them he said, "those were made by that comb that you see in her hair now. She stood like this," he stepped to the door, "and fought off the attacks as long as she could."

"By jingo, you're right," and Fraser looked his admiration. "I always said you were a born detective, Dave."

"Not at all. But I read a lot of detective yarns and it makes me deductive, I suppose. Anyway I'm sure about this thing. In a room like this those disfiguring scratches would not have been permitted to remain on that immaculate door."

"Well," put in Rankin, "I don't see as that's much help. I observe Mrs. Sayre is wearing a sort of comb—barrette is what they call those things—and like as not it did make those scratches, but what

of it? They're not finger prints and they don't get us anywhere, do they?"

Stanhope was kneeling over the prostrate form and with great care was lifting the shreds of torn silk and lace, and scrutinizing them.

"I trust you, Mr. Stanhope," Rankin said, "not to disturb any evidence. I've seen all I want to, and I think Fraser, you'd better get at the inquest. Come along, Doctor Duncan. I'll send a couple of men up here to stand guard."

Stanhope was left alone as the men trooped downstairs, and being interested, he continued to gaze on the still beautiful face before him. He noted the long braid of dark hair, held at the top by the barrette of shell with a decoration of cut steel. He noted the hands were scratched and bruised and the waves of hair about the face were so tangled as to indicate a physical battle.

Just as he heard the steps of the officers Rankin had sent up, he noticed what looked like a cobweb on the carpet. Half unconsciously, he brushed it up and rolled it flimsily between his fingers.

He continued to examine the details of the dead woman's clothing, but beyond observing that her night dress was of fine batiste with a touch of lace at the neck and short sleeves, and that she wore no jewelry save a wedding ring, he left the bedroom and went to the other one.

One of the policemen had now taken a seat in each room, but beyond a salutation they said no word to Stanhope, and he felt free to do as he chose. There was nothing to do, however, except to observe the furniture, yet try as he might he could find nothing that seemed to be a clue.

The room of Nevin Lawrence, though quite different in effect, was as well appointed as the other. The predominant coloring was old blue, and the walls were plain gray with white painted woodwork. His brushes and toilet appointments were of the best but not of an ornamental type.

There were no fripperies or trinkets about, yet the room had an air of being well cared for. Even the arrangement of a few chicory blossoms in a silver vase seemed to show a more appreciative eye for harmony than Emma Lily could boast, and Stanhope concluded that Mrs. Sayre was a devoted sister and looked after her brother's æsthetic pleasure as well as his creature comforts.

In this room there were no signs of a struggle. As had been already concluded, doubtless Nevin Lawrence was awakened only to meet his death an instant later. His apparent resistance was probably immediate and instinctive, but quite useless against this determined murderer.

As assumed, it was quite probable that Mrs. Sayre, hearing this shot had flung on her kimono as

she started for her brother's room. Had been met at her own door by the desperate marauder, and had, after a short, fierce struggle, been herself shot down.

Only one act of vandalism, which was doubtless an accident, Stanhope assumed, was to be seen in Lawrence's room.

A small terra cotta statuette lay on the floor broken into a score of fragments.

"A Tanagra Figurine!" exclaimed Stanhope, picking up the bit that showed the face of the little figure. "And a corking fine one. Wonder how the murderer came to upset only this valuable bit of bric-a-brac. But it must have been accidental, for if he had known its value he would have appropriated it himself. Wonder if it could be mended by an expert." He was about to pick up the pieces when the officer on guard stopped him, with a courteous reminder that nothing was to be touched.

"And that's right," Stanhope agreed, "there may be finger prints on those pieces."

Pausing only a moment longer to look over the names of the books on a reading table, Stanhope made his way downstairs.

Coroner Fraser, who was brisk of action, already had his inquest well under way. It was rather a preliminary inquiry than a formal inquest, but Fraser was too anxious to ask questions quickly, to allow of any delay. So he was interviewing the servants first,

with a wary eye out for any hint as to which way to look next.

As a matter of fact, the man was nonplussed. He knew Nevin Lawrence slightly, though he had never met Mrs. Sayre, and he could conceive of no reason any one could have for killing either of them, unless it had been a burglar. And burglars were unknown in this part of the country. Never had there been so much as a robbery in New Midian, and, moreover, so far as had yet been learned, nothing had been stolen. The silver was on the sideboard, Mrs. Sayre's jewelry was in her dresser drawer, and though the pearl pin had not been found, it might yet turn up.

So Fraser went ahead, methodically, hoping something would occur to give him a hint of the truth.

George Bailey, a clean cut young chap of twenty-five was being questioned when Stanhope reached the living room, where the inquiry was held.

Bailey was the chauffeur, but he lived at home, and only arrived at the Woodbine each morning about nine o'clock or so.

His story was of no evidential value whatever, for he only declared that he had gone home the night before at six o'clock, and not being wanted in the evening, had not returned until the next morning.

"Where were you last evening?" asked Fraser.

"Home to supper, spent the evening with my

girl, and home and to bed about ten," was the succinct reply.

"Any witnesses to this?" Fraser snapped.

"Father, mother, and the rest of the family."

"Who is your girl?"

"Rosie Gale. She works for Mrs. Lee, but she's home evenings."

The young man's manner was straightforward and unembarrassed. Fraser was a pretty good judge of human nature, and he saw no reason for the slightest suspicion of the chauffeur. But he said:

"You always on good terms with Mr Lawrence?"

"Best ever," Bailey replied.

"Mrs. Sayre, too, of course?"

"She was an angel, if ever there was one," exclaimed Bailey with tears in his eyes.

And then, Fraser suddenly remembered that he ought to get the Doctor's report at this juncture. As a coroner he was inexperienced, but he had a clear head and a fairly good idea of relative values.

His informal jury of seven or eight citizens had been hastily recruited, but he wanted to give them all possible data to work on.

Doctor Duncan in his grave, impressive way told of his findings. He said the brother and sister had been shot at nearly the same time, that both were killed at or near the hour of two in the morn-

ing, that each died as the result of a bullet fired from a Smith & Wesson hammerless revolver of thirty-eight caliber. Both were shot through the heart at very close range, and the logical assumption was that both were killed by the same weapon and by the same person or persons.

"You think Mr. Lawrence was shot first?" Fraser asked.

"I do," returned Doctor Duncan. "Naturally the first shot would awaken the other sleeper, and as Mr. Lawrence was killed in his bed, I hold that the obvious conclusion is that the intruder shot him, and thereby awakened Mrs. Sayre, who arose and ran to his assistance. Then she was met at her own door and shot, probably because she was a dangerous witness to the crime. Had she not appeared, the murderer might have left without further delay. This, of course, is only surmise."

"You think both these victims fought for their life?"

"I don't think they had much opportunity for a fight; at least, Mr. Lawrence didn't. It was a deliberate, cold-blooded assassin who attacked him, who stood near and shot with a calm and unswerving aim."

"Yet he was not shot in his sleep?"

"I should say the approach of the murderer waked him, or maybe he was not asleep, yet saw

the danger too late to ward it off in any way. Mrs. Sayre, however, fought desperately. She evidently attacked her assailant, and was only killed after a wild fight."

"Yet the noise of this did not arouse the neighbors."

"That is the strange part of it all. None of the guests at Gray Porches next door seemed to be disturbed. This might lead to the surmise that the murderer was not a stranger to the victims."

"Bring in that servant," said Fraser abruptly.

At a nod of summons the house-keeper came in from the kitchen.

"What is your name?" the coroner said, looking at her severely.

"Emma Lily Stagg," and the words snapped out, while the straight, strong woman stood with folded arms, looking like a grenadier.

About forty, Emma Lily was the type of wiry strength and tireless capability so often seen in New England kitchens. She was above instruction, beyond advice; she claimed to know it all, and usually made good her claim. She resented any interference in her own domain, but was quite ready to invade the domains of others.

Janet Sayre had been annoyed at some of her idiosyncracies, but had found her services so indis-

pensable, that any little misunderstanding was quickly patched up.

"How long have you worked for Mr. Lawrence?"

"'Bout two years."

"You found him a kind master?"

"Couldn't be better. Both of 'em—white clear through."

"Paid you good wages?"

"All I asked."

"And had Mr. Lawrence or Mrs. Sayre made any provision for you by will?"

"Yes—sir—ee! They each of 'em bequested me a thousand dollars, and that's the only ray o' sunshine in this vale of tears!"

"Ah, they each willed you a thousand dollars! That seems a great deal."

"Yep, it seems so to me, too. But it's the truth."

"And you're glad to have the money—you were in haste to get it—"

"Now, see here, Mr. Coroner, don't you go to flingin' no aspersions! If you mean did I kill these two people to get that money, I didn't, and nobody can prove I did."

She looked round the room with a belligerent air, which was not entirely devoid of fear. Her face was white and her small black, shoe-button eyes

darted from one face to another as if she found herself up against some unexpected menace.

"I say, nobody can prove I did!" and this time her tone was truculent.

"Nobody's trying to prove anything but the truth," said the coroner. "Now just tell us all you can of the happenings of last evening. Were Mr. Lawrence and his sister alone at dinner?"

"Yes, they wasn't no comp'ny. Not that we often do have comp'ny—jest now and then a few neighbors, but only now and then."

"And after dinner?"

"Why, after dinner, lemme see, I did up the dishes, and I set on the back porch a spell—Miss Busby, she ran over for a minute—and then I went to bed fairly early."

"No callers?"

"No—oh, yes, young Hazelton, he came—'long 'bout nine, I should judge."

"How long did he stay?"

"I don't know. They never required me to stay to tend door in the evenings. I did let Barker Hazelton in, but I don't know when he went away. Mrs. Sayre, she went out a few minutes, just to run over to the liberry to change her books, and then, after Lizzie Busby talked to me, she went in the house for a few minutes, and then soon after that, I let Bark Hazelton in and then directly I went up to bed. My

room is in the extension, and from it I can't see anybody comin' or goin' nor hear them neither."

"Well, Emma Lily, you've mixed me up a little. Now, was Miss Busby your caller or Mrs. Sayre's?"

"Why, both? She ran over from her house, and passed the time with me on the back steps where I was settin' and then she says: 'The folks in the house?' and I says yes, and she went through the kitchen and along in. It was just about then I seen Mrs. Sayre go out to the liberry."

"All right, and then young Hazelton called?"

"Yes, in a few minutes or so; I dunno exactly. Miss Busby she was there when Barker came in."

"And after you went to your room, you heard no unusual or suspicious sounds all through the night?"

"Not a bit of it. Of course, my room is on the far side of the house, I mean away from the neighbors and from the village. Anything I'd hear would be somebody coming along the road from the other way."

"And you didn't?"

"Nothin' that I noticed. Mighta been a motor car or two, or some spoonin' couples walkin' out. But I didn't notice nothin'."

"And then, this morning?"

"Well, this morning everything was just as always, till they didn't come down, and I waited and

I called, and I couldn't hear no sounds, so I ran up—and I saw 'em."

"All right, Emma Lily. Now just one question more about last evening. When Mr. Hazelton called, what sort of a temper was he in?"

"What sort of a temper!" the woman's face went white. "Land! You don't suspect Bark of the murder, do you?"

"Don't ask questions, answer them," Fraser said sternly. "And tell the truth."

"Well, then, he was kinder mad. He had a quiet, still look on his face that was like he was just determined 'bout somethin'."

"What did he say to Mr. Lawrence first?"

"Good land, how do I know? I ain't a reporter—"

"Answer my question."

"Why, I s'pose he said How de do, or somethin' like that."

Fraser looked at her steadily. He was a man of quick intuition, and he sensed the woman's reluctance to speak. He even shook a threatening forefinger at her, as he said, "No more of that quibbling, tell me what he said."

"Well, then," Emma Lily was cowed into submission, "he said, 'I've come to settle that matter once for all, Mr. Lawrence. You've got to put up

or shut up.' But the boy didn't mean anything by that."

"Never mind what he meant, stick to what he said. Then what did Mr. Lawrence say?"

"He said, right pleasantly, 'sit down, Hazelton, let's talk it over,' and that's all I heard, by that time I was goin' through the door to the kitchen."

Emma Lily's story seemed finished, but before Fraser could proceed there was an interruption.

Someone had arrived at the front door who insisted on admittance.

"I must see her," a hollow, quavering voice said. "I *must* see her!"

And then they heard hesitating, unsteady steps ascending the stairs. Stanhope from his seat in the living room, commanded a view of the hall and to his utter amazement, he saw that the man on the stairs was the white-faced man he had seen on the train coming up from New York the day before.

"Now what does that mean?" he asked himself; but, trusting to the discretion of his assistant policemen, Frazer paid no attention to the incident and called his next witness.

In a moment, Stanhope saw the man come back downstairs, and with bowed head go out of the front door and walk slowly along the country road that led away from the village.

His face was of the same chalk-white that had attracted Stanhope's notice so strongly, and as he went out, through the door, he said softly, to somebody, "no, it ain't the one I thought it was. It's a terrible thing, but I don't know these people."

"A queer old duck," Stanhope said to himself. "And it's none of my business, but if I were a coroner or a sheriff, I'd ask a few questions of that white-faced man!"

CHAPTER IV

FATHER AND SON

STANHOPE, without his host, had gone down to the village in the Hazelton motor. They had dropped Barker Hazelton at the railway station to take the earliest train for New York. Then Stanhope, with the chauffeur had gone the marketing rounds, and hearing of the Woodbine tragedy and knowing the coroner pretty well, had gone there and remained for some time.

But when he heard the tale of Barker's call on Nevin Lawrence the night before, Stanhope concluded it was time for him to go back and tell Amos Hazelton about it.

He had no trouble in finding the Hazelton car, for Martin, the chauffeur, was among the crowd that was blocking the road and choking the path that led to the house.

Reaching Hazel Hill, Stanhope told Amos the details as far as he knew them.

And he had scarcely finished when two men in plain clothes arrived and demanded to see Barker Hazelton.

"He's gone to New York," his father said, "can I be of any use?"

"Well, can you tell me anything of your son's movements last night?"

The man, Lewis by name, was frank and courteous of manner, but his eye was alert and his tone a bit sharp.

"Before I answer your question," Hazelton said, "will you tell me why you want to know?"

"As this gentleman here can witness, the inquest down at Woodbine cottage has brought out evidence that your son called there last night and is the last person so far known to have seen Mr. Nevin Lawrence alive."

Amos Hazelton looked grave.

"I am sorry to say," he began, "I can tell you nothing at all of my son's movements last evening. I only know that after dinner he went down to the village as he does nearly every night. I don't know what time he came home, as he has a latch key and comes and goes as he chooses. He was at breakfast this morning and left the house just on time to catch the eight-thirty train for New York. He will be home about five or six this afternoon, I suppose."

"Know where I can get in touch with him in New York?"

"No, I'm sorry to say I don't. But he'll show up all right this afternoon. Now, Mr. Lewis, don't mince matters. Is my boy suspected of this crime?"

"No, sir, I'm not prepared to say that. But,

as you must understand, it is necessary to question him. He was known to be at the Lawrence house from about nine o'clock on, and also, he was known to be in a bad temper."

"Yes, and it is common knowledge that Mr. Lawrence and my son were rival candidates for the presidency of the Country Club. But, to my mind, that doesn't imply a murderous impulse in my son's heart."

"Nor to my mind, either, Mr. Hazelton. But you must see that we want an interview with him. He might give us important information as to the murderer."

"All I can promise is that I will let you know as soon as he returns home."

"Don't trouble yourself about that. He will be met at the station. But what we want is to get him home sooner. You can give us no idea where he is spending the day?"

"Not the least. It is Barker's vacation this month, and he naturally idles about. He is oftenest at home, but he runs down to the city or to the seashore now and then. But he almost never stays away over night without letting me know of his plans."

"Is your son possessed of a quick temper?"

"Very quick. But I cannot think he belongs to the criminal class."

"Not all crimes are committed by the criminal class. It has been said there is nothing essentially incongruous between crime and culture. Not that I am making any accusations. I merely want to show that it is necessary to interview Mr. Barker Hazelton as soon as may be. I bid you good morning."

The two men went away, the second one not speaking, except bare civilities, and Amos Hazelton turned a despairing face to his friend.

"Bad lookout, Dave. My boy has fairly a gunpowder temper. He flies into a passion in a moment."

"Oh, come, now, Amos, don't be scared by those men. They're more self important than logical. They saw you were frightened and they hoped to get some admission out of you. Now, you and I know Barker couldn't possibly have done this thing, and the worst course for us to take is to admit that he possibly could."

"But he could have done it. You don't know Bark as I do. You haven't seen him for the last few years. He's a strange chap, and I wouldn't vouch for what he would or wouldn't do in a moment of sudden, fierce anger."

"But for a matter of a club election, to kill two people! It's preposterous!"

"Preposterous or not, there's a possibility. Now, I trust to you to help me. You're up on these subjects, crime, murder—all that. And you must advise

me. Shall I try to locate Bark and tell him not to come home? ”

Stanhope looked at his friend in amazement.

“ Keep your head, Amos,” he said, almost impatiently. “ It’s too absurd to talk that way! Why the boy hasn’t been accused! ”

“ But he will be! I know that Lewis, he lives over Beechfield way, and he belongs to the State Police. He’s got it in his head that Bark is guilty—”

“ Well, he’ll have to get it out! ” Stanhope broke in. “ Now, you leave this thing to me. As you say, I know more or less of such matters and if Barker isn’t guilty, rest assured he’ll have no trouble or bother in the matter. If he is—I’ll take charge of the whole affair.”

“ Another thing, Eleanor will hear of this, it’ll be in the papers. I must go to her.”

“ Just where is she? ”

“ She and Nell are in the White Mountains, at Profile House. I’ll go right up there.”

“ No, wait till you see Barker. Your wife and daughter will not see to-morrow’s papers until to-morrow evening, and of course, there’ll be nothing in to-day’s papers. Tell me more about these Lawrences.”

“ There’s so little to tell. At least I know little. Nothing, in fact, beyond their estimable qualities and general popularity. That’s the worst of it, nobody

could have a thing against Nevin Lawrence. If he had been a man who made enemies there might have been suspects. But he was a favorite with all sorts and classes. And as for his sister, everybody adored her. There never have been people in New Midian more universally admired and respected."

"Did he come and settle in this little place to get characters for his stories?"

"I don't think so. I never heard of his using any of us. His stories are, I think, purely imaginary. He said he came here because he was attracted by the beauty of the place, and he and his sister wanted a quiet little home with a garden, not too far from New York."

"Know anything about his family or antecedents?"

"I don't; but then I don't know him intimately at all. You see, he's a younger man than I am, and though he's older than Barker they've been chummy."

"How old was Lawrence, do you suppose?"

"Less than forty—thirty-eight, or so, likely. Mrs. Sayre, my wife said, not a day over thirty."

"Mrs. Hazelton liked them both?"

"Oh, yes, very much. I tell you, everybody did."

"And what was the cause of this great popularity?"

"Nothing, except that they were cultured, refined people, with a good sense of humor, and a kindly

courtesy to all the village. They minded their own business, but they were always ready to take part in any general celebration or subscribe to any town project. They were devoted to each other, and always ready and willing to entertain and be entertained. They belonged to the various clubs, and were good mixers, though they spent a lot of time at home. Seemed to enjoy their home, always adding a pergola or a garden seat, or a new bay window."

"Own the house?"

"No, Lawrence rented it from Ben Gray, but there was talk lately of his buying it. What I'm getting at is, that I know of no neighbor or villager who could have done this thing. I don't believe for a minute that it was a burglar—they were not wealthy people—and so, what theory is left but some-one of a quick temper striking in anger!"

"But, hold on, Amos, you're far too ready to think evil of your own son. These people had gone to bed and to sleep. Barker must have left there some time before."

"Oh, I know, I know—but—well, I may as well tell you—Barker came home last night, and went to his room. Then later he went back down to the village again."

"You're sure?"

"Saw him. Bright moonlight, you know. Saw

him go out about midnight and he came back much later. I didn't see him come in but I heard him."

"At what time?"

"I didn't look, but it was perhaps a couple of hours later—say about two."

David Stanhope was troubled. It began to look at least a little dubious for the son of his friend.

But he only said, "cut it all out, don't think about it until we can get Barker's own story. Why, Amos, its too absurd to imagine one man killing another to be president of a foolish little village club!"

"It's really a county club, and a rather large and important one."

"But to kill a man because he prefers not to carry a flask in his hip pocket!"

"It isn't that, it's the principle. I've heard Bark discuss it again and again. He says the liberty of the club members should not be so prescribed. Says the U. S. A. can make laws for its citizens, but personal liberty cannot be trammelled by a fellow man. Oh, I know his attitude, and Lawrence felt just the opposite. I sided with Lawrence, I admit, but of course, I didn't say that to Barker, except in a guarded way."

"Well, I'm going back to the inquest. I suppose it's still going on. Coroner Fraser is nobody's fool, and he's very careful and exact but he's mortal slow.

I'll bet he hasn't called more than two or three witnesses yet. Will you go Amos?"

"No. At first I thought I would, but I'll stay here. You see, Barker might come home—er—on the quiet."

"He might, but he won't. I believe I know that chap better than you do, if you are his father. If he had killed a man, the first thing he'd do would be to give himself up."

"I'll stay home anyway. You go along down, Dave, and can't you be around the station when the afternoon trains come in? You can command the car."

"Yes, I'll do that. By the way, that man Lawrence wears a ring—a fine catseye. Now, I haven't much use for a man who'll wear a ring."

"Don't carry such fastidiousness too far. It was a good dignified, manly-looking affair. I don't approve of rings for men, either, but remember he was a literary man, and they're allowed a little extra liberty in such matters. Take my word for it, Nevin Lawrence was a real man—a man's man, ring or no ring."

When Stanhope reached Woodbine Cottage again, Fraser was grilling Emma Lily.

But Dave learned that it was a second interview, there had been an interval during which the wills of the deceased had been produced and read.

As the house-keeper had told, there was a bequest to her of one thousand dollars from Mr. Lawrence and another thousand from Mrs. Sayre. The local lawyer had drawn the wills and brought them to read.

Nevin Lawrence's will provided that at his death everything of his should become the property of Mrs. Janet Lawrence Sayre, and Mrs. Sayre's will, in turn left everything to Nevin Lawrence.

Both wills also provided that if the legatee were not alive, the property should revert to the New Midian Library, in which institution both testators had shown a deep and abiding interest.

As the lawyer had summed it up, although the medical evidence declared the deaths were nearly simultaneous, the detectives felt sure that Mr. Lawrence died first. Yet, in either case, the property of the one who died first became the property of the survivor, and since both were now dead, both estates were surely the property of the Library Corporation.

As the minor bequests, the two thousand to Emma Lily and one thousand to George Bailey, the chauffeur, were unchanged by these decisions, there was no one to object.

Much discussion was indulged in regarding the possible heirs or relatives of the dead brother and sister, and it was proposed to advertise for any news of such, but no criticism was heard of the silence of the two as to their previous home or kindred.

"They made no secret of it," declared Emma Lily, "they made no secret of anything. They used to live in Chicago, and when Mr. Lawrence took up his writing notion, he wanted to be near New York 'count of his editor's bein' there. And they didn't like city life, so they came here, where there was good train service to New York. I've heard Mr. Lawrence say that time and again. They wasn't no mystery about those two, of that I'm certain."

But the ever alert Fraser had the editor in question rung up on the telephone.

"Why, I don't know much about Lawrence," that dignitary responded. "He was a most courteous, rather scholarly man. He wrote stories and I printed them. That's about all I know of him, except his home address and the price I paid him per word."

The investigation of Lawrence's writing table gave no more light on his private affairs. To be sure, his records and check books revealed the price he was paid for his stories and the prices he paid out for his purchases, but these were all of the most natural and usual description.

Mrs. Sayre had charge accounts at the New York shops, as did Lawrence. Her feminine belongings were on bills made out to herself and paid by her own checks. Purchases for the house or for the

table, as well as his own apparel or library supplies were paid by Lawrence. All these bills and statistics were in order, yet things were not itemized down to the last penny. There was no cheese paring.

"Just as I should do such things myself," Stanhope soliloquized, as he looked over the desk.

All in all, there was no cause to suspect anything mysterious or bizarre about the life or death of two such normal, admirable characters, nor was there the slightest evidence that any secret matter had led to the double tragedy.

"It's too easy," Fraser summed up. "It's either that Emma Lily, who couldn't wait for her fortune, or it was a passing highwayman. I know they don't infest these parts, but there might have been one all the same. You needn't tell me young Hazelton killed these two for a fool quarrel about a club matter!"

This he said to Dave Stanhope, who was not only an old friend but a wise and deep thinker, and in whose opinions Fraser had a deal of confidence.

"What about that broken statuette?" asked Stanhope, suddenly.

"Knocked down in the scuffle—"

"But there was no scuffle in Lawrence's room—"

"That's so; look here, Emma Lily, who broke the little statue in Mr. Lawrence's room?"

"Whoever did the killin'!" she returned sol-

emny. "I say—whoever did the killin', that 'er Tangerine—"

"That what?"

"Tangerine they always called it."

Stanhope interposed. "She means Tanagra Figurine. They're rather valuable. But I want to know how it happened to get smashed."

"Musta been knocked off by the murderer," declared Emma Lily, looking disinterested.

"But then it would have been broken only in two or three pieces. This was smashed to bits—looked as if it had been ground with somebody's heel in anger."

"Maybe it was," came the imperturbable response. "I say, maybe it was. The man musta been furious mad to kill 'em at all—both of 'em. So, why wasn't he mad enough to bite a tenpenny nail in two or smash a little clay statue?"

"Yes, but why would he?" Stanhope persisted.

"I don't know," Emma Lily said.

Fraser watched her closely. He had it so firmly in mind that she was the murderer, he was so sure that she was clever enough to act any sort of an innocent part, that he tried his best to trip her up. It might well be, he thought, that there had been some fuss about the little curio—perhaps it had led to a row, and the woman had smashed the lovely piece of art in sheer spite and venom.

Fraser couldn't quite make out Emma Lily, and he studied her hard. To begin with, she was a little too cocky, he thought. Of course she was in charge of the house, but she put on too many airs and assumed too dictatorial a manner to please him entirely.

"You must know a lot about these two people," Fraser said to her, sternly. You couldn't live with them and not know more or less about their everyday life."

"But it's less," Emma Lily cried, triumphantly. She seemed to enjoy disappointing her inquisitor. "I've served their meals and took care of their rooms for nigh on two years, but I don't know any more about them than any of their neighbors do. Maybe not half as much as some," and she sent a meaning glance at Busybody Busby, who was listening intently.

The inquest had become a mere informal talk, but Fraser felt sure he could get at the truth better this way than any other. He still had Busybody up his sleeve, but he wanted to polish off Emma Lily first.

"You are pretty smart to do all the work of this house. To get the meals and take care of the whole house is no small task for one woman."

Emma Lily looked rather pleased than otherwise

at this tribute to her efficiency, and said with a touch of modesty:

"Well, Mrs. Sayre helped more or less with the upstairs work. I say she helped more or less. The living room, too, and Mr. Lawrence's study. I swep' and dusted, but she liked to fiddle around with the ornaments and books, and she always fixed the flowers."

Stanhope nodded at his own perspicacity in having realized there was the touch of a loving hand to be noted in the household appointments, but Fraser was on another track.

"And you meddled with the little statue, and broke it—was that it?"

"Nothing of the sort!" Emma Lily almost screamed. "*I* never harmed the thing. I never touched it—never had it in my hand! Nobody can prove I did!"

"Your word is enough," said Fraser, contemptuously; "nobody wants to prove you did. But its queer how it is smashed up."

He looked contemplatively at the bits and scraps of red clay, which had been collected in a pasteboard box. He was most anxious to bolster up his theory that Emma Lily had broken the statuette, had been scolded, and had—but he suddenly saw his theory as absurd and with a sigh he turned to pastures new.

These were the boarders at Gray Porches. Many

of them had come over, and were only too ready and willing to give voluble and tautological evidence that was no evidence at all.

He warded them off with difficulty, learning first of all from Ben Gray and his wife that neither of them had heard or seen anything unusual or suspicious in the neighborhood during the night.

All the servants of the boarding house asserted the same thing. All the guests whose rooms faced toward Woodbine were interrogated and all denied having any knowledge of the least disturbance of any sort or kind.

Miss Lizzie Busby, seemed fairly bursting with a desire to be called as a witness, but Fraser knew she would keep—knew, too, her reputation for news and gossip, and preferred to ask the others first.

There were few others. Gray Porches, Miss Busby's house and Woodbine cottage were the only residences on that street—or lane, as it merely was.

The Lawrence chauffeur was not on duty at night, and slept at his mother's house in the village. The Busby servant also slept at home, and came around mornings when she got good and ready.

So the Gray Porches people being done up, and the milkman and baker having been able to offer no helpful word, Fraser found elimination had brought him to Busybody Busby and he called on her.

“But,” he whispered to Dave Stanhope, “don't

put too much faith in her yarns. She knows it all, she's the town gossip, you know, and she doesn't hesitate to embroider her stories, if she thinks she can make an impression."

"Put her on oath," suggested Dave.

"Can't exactly do that, at an informal inquiry. But maybe I can scare her into telling the truth. Trouble is, I don't believe she has anything to tell. She'll make it up."

There was a silence as the little old maid came forward and took the seat designated for her.

She was not ill-looking, but her pale, ashen hair was lusterless, and her faded blue eyes rather weak and reddened, as if she had wept.

She had a wistful face in repose, but when talking, she forgot herself in her enthusiasm and her expression became animated, even dramatic in its intensity.

CHAPTER V

BUSYBODY'S STORY

FRASER was a little uncertain just how it would be best to get at Miss Busby's story. He hesitated to intimidate her, lest she should get stubborn and tell nothing. And he feared to let her tell her own version, for she might ramble on unendingly and perhaps fictitiously.

So he said in rather a stern way:

"Miss Busby, can you tell anything definite and important that will help us in the investigation of this matter?"

"I should say I could!" she fairly exploded. Her eyes brightened, her manner became animated and she quivered with eagerness to begin.

"Let her do it," counseled Stanhope, and Fraser nodded acquiescence.

"Well, late last night, I was looking out of my window—"

"Wait a minute," Fraser interrupted, "begin at the beginning. Go back to your visit here in the evening."

For some unaccountable reason Miss Busby blushed scarlet. A wave of color swept over her pale face and she bit her lip in an effort to retain her composure.

Emma Lily watched her curiously, and nodded her head as if in satisfied confirmation of some already drawn conclusion.

But Busybody Busby couldn't be daunted for long. Picking up her courage, she began again.

"All right, then. I ran over here for a few minutes' chat, last evening and I found Emma Lily on the back porch and talked with her."

"About what?"

"Must I tell?"

Her air of dismay tempted Fraser and he said, sternly, "yes, tell the conversation as nearly as you remember it."

"All right, then. We talked about the new boarders over at Gray's and I said I thought the big woman from New York was handsome but I didn't think much of the two old maids; and she thought that Mrs. Endicott from Boston was—"

"Stop! How dare you talk like that?" Fraser was so shocked that he fairly quivered with rage.

"You ordered me to tell," Miss Busby said, serenely, "and that was all we talked about. We always talk over the new boarders as they come."

The new boarders in question, who were present, showed their indignation in various ways, and the Grays themselves looked as if they would willingly see Miss Busby boiled in oil.

Fraser felt that only an immediate change of subject could save the situation, so he said:

"After your talk on the back porch, you came on into the house?"

"I did," replied Miss Busby who greatly enjoyed the commotion she had caused.

"What for?"

"What for? Merely to visit a few minutes with Mrs. Sayre and her brother and maybe talk the new boarders over with them."

"Miss Busby, I want your evidence, but I must ask you to refrain from personal remarks."

"Oh, all right. Well, I got in here and Mrs. Sayre was just starting to run over to the library. Run ahead I told her, and I'll keep Mr. Lawrence comp'ny till you get back."

"And did you?"

"Well, no." Again that blush stole over the cheeks of the witness, and Fraser began to suspect it had to do with Nevin Lawrence. This surmise was strengthened by the sly look on the face of Emma Lily.

But Miss Busby continued calmly, "you see, young Hazelton came, and I thought as the two men likely 's not wanted to talk about the club business, I'd better get along home. So I went."

"Now, tell me, Miss Busby, you're observant,

what did you notice about Barker Hazelton? I mean, was he in an angry mood?"

"Well, he was." She put her head on one side, as if considering carefully. "Not that I'd do that young man a mite o' harm. But I must say he was. He was hardly inside the door before he was threatening Mr. Lawrence—"

"Oh, come, now, Miss Busby, what do you mean by threatening?"

"Well, he was saying that Mr. Lawrence better look out or—"

"Or what?"

"Good land! I don't know. He was just blustering as boys will. Mr. Lawrence he was very cool and calm—and, do you know, I think that made Bark madder'n ever, and when I left he was shaking his fist in Mr. Lawrence's face—"

"Shaking his fist?"

"Well, anyway—he was mad as hops—"

"Now look here, Miss Busby, this is evidence, not merely opinions—be careful what you say."

Dave Stanhope listened with growing apprehension.

Better than Fraser he knew the uncertain value of the evidence of a talkative woman. He knew that if Miss Busby felt she was creating a sensation by her story, she would enlarge on it and touch up its picturesque points beyond actual truth.

Moreover, he knew that if Fraser should think there was any reason to suspect Barker Hazelton, he would question Miss Busby toward that idea and she would follow his lead.

Knowing young Hazelton as he did, Stanhope felt there was necessity for inquiry into his movements the night before, but it should be made discreetly, even privately, and the boy should not be thrown to the waiting crowd, so ready and eager to believe the worst.

For human nature is like sheep, and the breathless audience all agog for a suspect to pounce upon, were quite ready to tumble over each other in any direction that might be hinted at.

In his quiet, pleasant way, Stanhope put in a word.

"Try to picture the scene to yourself, Miss Busby," he suggested. "Where were you?"

"In the library—I was just going out to go home, as Barker came in."

"Then you three were standing—"

"Yes, we were, I can see it plain enough! Of course I didn't say anything, the men were both angry—"

"And then, Barker shook his fist at Mr. Lawrence—which fist? Did you know he is left-handed?"

"Of course. And he shook his left fist in Mr. Lawrence's face—"

"And in his right hand, I suppose he held that little Malacca cane he always carries in the evening—"

"Yes, he did! And he was as mad—"

"Wait a moment, Miss Busby," and Stanhope looked at her sternly now, "Barker Hazelton is not left-handed, and to my certain knowledge he never carries a cane of any sort. You are very amenable to suggestion, and I for one, can't feel that your evidence is to be implicitly depended on."

Frazer looked more chagrined than the witness herself. He had known that the Busybody was inclined to exaggerate, but he hadn't realized how easy it was to lead an inaccurate witness into imaginary statements.

Miss Busby was all unmoved at the trap she had fallen into.

"I don't see as it matters," she said; "I didn't notice which hand he used, and if he'd carried a puppy under his arm, 'stid of a cane, I dunno as it would affect the matter. But I've got more important matters to tell of than Bark Hazelton's walking stick! I saw the murderer come round late last night."

"Tell us, then," commanded Fraser, "but be careful to tell only the truth—only what you know."

Good natured Busybody was not at all offended by this adjuration. She had had the village folk for an audience too long and too continuously not to feel sure that she was going to startle them with

her story, and she was herself highly wrought up with the mystery and excitement of it all.

"Well it was late last night, and it was a beautiful moonlight night, and I couldn't sleep, so I was looking out my front window. From there I can see all the back part of the Woodbine cottage, and all of the side and back of Gray Porches, my house being sort of between 'em, but farther back from the road. There wasn't a glimmer of light in either house. Nor I didn't have any light turned on. I just sat there, taking in the moonlight, when I thought I saw a dark figger snoopin' round the Lawrence house. It looked to be a tall man, wearin' a soft slouchy sort of a hat, an' a long, dark coat. He was movin' slowly and he stepped about sort of uncertain like, 's if he hadn't made up his mind—"

"Never mind his mind," Fraser snapped at her, "tell of his bodily proceedings."

"Well," and Busybody rolled her eyes around at her listeners in quite evident delight at the way they hung on her words. The aristocratic boarders from Gray's were obviously as curious as the simple villagers, and Stanhope's blue eyes were fastened on the speaker's face, while Fraser sat ready to check her up if she wandered from fact to fancy.

"Well," she said, slowly, "it was aggravatin' you must admit, but everytime I'd be about to catch sight of his face, the moon would get under a cloud."

"It clouded over entirely about two o'clock," Fraser put in.

"Yes, I know it. Well, this was long about quarter of two, I guess, and that man prowled—that's the very word, prowled—along the side of the Woodbine, and looked in the windows—"

"Which windows?"

"The library window first, then the little window that is in the hall and then he went round toward the front of the house, and I couldn't see him."

"Why didn't you raise an alarm?"

"Alarm! Why should I? I didn't know there was going to be a murder done, did I? I thought it was queer that a man should be sneakin' round here like that, 'cause we never have marauders. But it wasn't up to me, a lone woman, to look after the property rights of a householder like Nevin Lawrence!"

"But if you thought a skulking intruder had entered a neighbor's house—"

"I dunno's he entered the house. I saw him skulk but I didn't see him intrude. I only tell what I saw—as you asked me to do—but, in the light of later events, I think probably it was the murderer I saw."

"Describe this man exactly. Was he young or old?"

"Now how could I tell that? He wore a long coat, like a motor coat or a rain coat, that flapped about his heels, like it was too long for him. He had his hands in his pockets, and his hat was pulled way down and his collar turned up, like he didn't want to be reggonized."

Though fairly well educated, in moments of stress, Miss Busby was a bit careless in her pronunciation.

"You noticed no other distinguishing characteristics?"

"No—except"—she hesitated, "well, I can't put it so's you'll see just what I mean, but his head looked queer."

"Queer, how?"

"I don't know, but queer. There was one time, when the moonlight struck him full—his back was toward me, then—and his head looked big somehow. And just then he took his two hands and pulled his hat down hard, not over his eyes, I don't mean, but pulled it down all around—"

"As if trying to make himself less recognizable?"

"Yes, that's it. And then he peered in the windows—"

"Perhaps he left fingerprints on the panes," Fraser said, quickly, and at once sent a man out to see.

"Go on, Miss Busby."

"Well, that's about all. I watched for a while, but I didn't see anything more, nor hear anything."

"You didn't hear shots?"

"Oh, my land, no! But the rooms—their rooms are in the front of the house, and I couldn't hear that far."

"And you didn't see any lights?"

"No, but there, again, from my house I couldn't see lights in those two front rooms. There wasn't any light in Emma Lily's room."

"The man was tall, you say?"

"Yes, pretty tall, and sort of heavy without being fat. Leastways that's the impression I got. Of course, I thought it all very queer, but of course, I didn't suppose anything dreadful was going on."

"Would you know that man if you saw him again?"

"I can't say. I might and I mightn't. You see, that long, straight ulster and that pulled down hat, just made a sort of sillywet, as you might say, and that aggravatin' moon always clouded over when I was gettin' a good squint at him."

"Did he have a long stride?"

"I couldn't say. He sneaked, he didn't stride ahead. He acted like he was scared to death."

"Scared?"

"Yes, scared of bein' seen, most likely, and why not, if he was the murderer?"

Fraser's emissaries returned to report that there were a goodly number of finger prints on the window panes in question. They seemed to be of various people, some small and some large, and it was recommended that the panes be taken from the sashes and preserved as evidence.

Fraser ordered this done, and then heard with surprise that clearly marked footprints had been found in the geranium bed beneath the library window.

"That's where he stood!" cried Miss Busby, triumphantly. "Now you can find him for sure!"

Stanhope was among the first to examine the footprints. They were indeed clear and plain, about a dozen of them. The soft earth of the flower-bed held them perfectly, and unless a shower came up they would last long enough for observation and investigation.

Fraser, however, was an up-to-date sort in some respects, and he ordered plaster casts made of the plainest and deepest of the prints

The shoes that made them, it would seem, would be readily identifiable. For it was quite apparent that they were not old or run over. The edges were clear and sharply defined, and there was the distinct impress of their rubber heels, which bore the design of a star in a circle. So well marked was this design that it was probable the shoes were nearly new.

As a matter of general interest every man present turned one of his shoe soles upward to the gaze of the rest.

"Too small for me, that shoe," Ben Gray said, and truly. "Nor did I ever wear rubber heels in my life."

"I always wear 'em," declared Mr. Endicott, "but I've never seen any with that design. Mine have an eagle on them."

"I don't like them," observed Mrs. Trent, "they are forever wearing off on the sides."

"I like them on tennis shoes," began Miss Lura Endicott, and Miss Hemingway interrupted with, "but those are whole rubber soles, not just heels," and then the crowd returned to the house and the inquiry was resumed.

Fraser took up his questioning of Miss Busby where he had left it off.

"Those footprints indicate a tall man," he said, "they were made by shoes that are long but not very wide. Do you think that fits in with your impression of the man you saw in the moonlight?"

"Perfectly," cried Busybody Busby. "He was tall and big, but not broad. And, anyway, whose else could they be? Everybody around here has compared his own shoes and they're none of them the same."

"Very obliging of the criminal to leave such

clear, neat prints," Dave Stanhope remarked to Fraser, in an undertone.

"They always slip up on some fool thing," Fraser returned, looking almost annoyed at his new find.

And then the two men's eyes met in a look of mutual understanding.

No words were needed to tell Stanhope that Fraser feared these were Barker Hazelton's footprints. Barker was tall and big without being very broad. He would wear about that size shoe, and it would be an easy matter to check up on him.

Stanhope went out by himself to look at the prints again.

There were many curious observers, but a guard kept them all from stepping on the flower bed.

Stanhope studied the prints from a little distance. He tried to get the details of the man's approach to the house.

It was only too easy to read the story.

The prints were made by someone facing the house, obviously engaged in peering in at the window. There were two or three prints superimposed, as if he had stood about for a minute or two, and then gone on.

This window and the footprints were on the side of the house toward Gray Porches, so that if anybody had been up and looking out of a window over there, the man might have been seen. No such witness

had been found, however, and probably Dave reasoned, all the boarding house guests had been in bed and asleep at two o'clock.

There were, he noticed, some six or eight bedroom windows, facing the cottage, but Miss Busby had seen no light in any of those, and he judged there had been none.

The footprints all toed toward the cottage, but it could not well have been otherwise, for the flower-bed was a mere narrow strip and close against the house. It was the most natural coign of vantage for one to choose who wished to look in at the window before going up onto the veranda.

But evidently the intruder had immediately stepped up on the porch—there were only three steps—and as he did so, he left a few grains of dirt from his shoes on the steps, but in no place on the steps or porch was there a definite footprint.

Close examination, however, showed plainly enough the successive grains of the soil, and Stanhope felt sure the man had gone at once into the house.

Front doors were never locked in New Midian. Such is the utter trustfulness of those New England villages, that doors and windows are left unfastened all round the clock.

The murderer then, could come and go, unhindered, could commit his awful errand and go away unmolested and undiscovered.

Of course, there were no returning footprints. The rugs or carpets inside had cleansed the shoes of even the few grains of soil that might have adhered, and his exit would naturally be unmarked.

Nor did that matter. The whole point at issue, in Stanhope's mind was whether those footprints in the flower-bed were made by Barker Hazelton's shoes or not. And he almost feared to find out.

It is unnecessary to detail all the wearisome but inevitable questions and their unsatisfactory answers that crowded the day.

Fraser did his best, his assistants did all they could, but, unless some evidence should point to Barker Hazelton, the whole matter was shrouded in mystery.

Lizzie Busby's story was interesting, but it was quite on the cards that her imagination had colored the sights she thought she saw.

On the other hand, if those prints corresponded with young Hazelton's footwear, it was quite possible her narration was entirely true.

Frazer wanted above all things to send for one of the young man's shoes at once. But he felt a certain hesitation about doing this too abruptly. Barker Hazelton's temper was town talk, his father was a man noted for his powers of righteous indignation, and Fraser argued that his friend Dave Stanhope would shortly be going back to Hazel Hill and

could find out about the shoes without undue publicity.

So he went on with his grilling and gruelling and found out some unimportant truths and some matters that were most likely untrue.

But try as he might, he could find no record of any previous dwelling place of Mr. Lawrence or Mrs. Sayre. He directed all his energies to this matter. He had the desks of both searched, he questioned the neighbors and the village people, but none had ever heard a word from either of them as to their home or homes before they came to New Midian.

Of course these things must eventually be traced. The agent through whom they first found the house could tell what references they gave and all that—and probably it would make little difference anyway.

But it seemed queer that no one had ever entered into discussion with them about their earlier life.

Emma Lily was recalled and questioned as to this.

No, she had never heard Mr. Lawrence or Mrs. Sayre discuss such matters with their callers or visitors.

No, she had never known them to have company from out of town, either to call or to visit.

No, she didn't think this was strange. She knew they came from Chicago, she knew that Mr. Law-

rence's wife and Mrs. Sayre's husband were dead, and she knew that if there was anything unpleasant or sad in their past life, at least there was nothing wrong. That she would maintain to her dying day.

"But do you not think it strange that Mr. Lawrence died without a struggle and Mrs. Sayre put up such a desperate fight?"

Emma Lily looked at him with a pitying stare.

"You poor fish," she said, being outspoken when deeply moved, "can't you see just how it was? I say, can't you *see* it?" Her voice rose almost to a scream. "The awful man found Mr. Lawrence asleep and killed him, coward!—as he slept. The shot naturally awakened Mrs. Sayre. She hopped up, and ran to see what had happened. Then that beast met her, just at her own door, and of course, she fought for her life—I say, of course she fought for her life! Who wouldn't? And she was a brave woman; I've no doubt she put up a big fight. But of course, she was no match for a great, strong man! He threw her to the floor, and there she lay—when I found her—reaching out her poor dead arms for—"

Emma Lily stopped suddenly, as if she had almost made a misstep.

"For what?"

"How do I know? I only mean she looked like she was reaching out for something."

“ But you meant to say something definite—did you mean that the murderer may have had the pearl pin that is missing? ”

“ Yes, that’s what I meant,” and the woman gave a quick sigh of relief. “ I say, that’s just what I meant.”

“ But she didn’t mean that,” Dave Stanhope said to himself.

CHAPTER VI

BARKER HAZELTON

"You lied, Busybody Busby, I say, you lied!" Emma Lily's black eyes snapped and her thin, wiry arms shot around nervously in vague emphasis of her speech. "I never saw your like! You'd rather lie than tell the truth, I do verily believe!"

"Hush your noise, Emma Lily, you lied yourself. What about that pearl pin—aha, I guess you could tell where *that* is!"

The two were on Miss Busby's porch, wrangling as usual, enjoying it as always. Both were nervously exhilarated and having been dismissed from the coroner's august presence, they were talking together over the awful happenings at Woodbine.

"Now what do you mean by that?" and Emma Lily's sharp little face puckered up into a menacing frown. "I say, what do you mean by that?"

Busybody Busby looked at her meaningly.

"Oh, I'm not so blind as those blundering men who are trying to find out things inside there! I knew the minute you stammered and stuttered about that poor lady reaching out for something that it was the pearl pin. *I* knew it."

"Well—I didn't deny it, did I?"

"No, but they never suspicioned, as I did, that

the pearl pin was there—on the floor—and you took it—you took it, Emma Lily Stagg! You can't deny that, either!"

"Busy Lizzie Busby, you make me tired! Imagine me stealing a pearl pin! Where would I hide it, pray? I haven't been away from the house—wouldn't they search my room? Wouldn't it be found on me? I say wouldn't it be found on me? And, look here, do you suppose for one single little teenty-taunty minute, that I'd steal from a dead person? Huh, I guess you judge other people by yourself! I say, I guess you do!"

"Then what was you a-reaching out for?"

"Don't you wish you knew?" and Emma Lily's thin lips pursed themselves to a teasing grimace. "And I'd thank you, Miss Busybody, not to ask me no more questions about my employers. Lovely people they was, and I'll do all I can for 'em now they're gone—I say—"

"Do all you can for 'em," jeered Miss Busby. "Sure enough you will! Ain't you gettin' a pot o' money, and a pearl pin, to say nothin' of pickins here and there? Oh, you needn't tell me, I know the pickins a quiet woman can get here and there after the lady of the house is gone forever! Many's the nice bit of clothing and little belongings you can absquatulate, Emma Lily—why, I make me no doubt your trunk's full of 'em already! But you don't

know nice things when you see 'em! Why didn't you take that little figger, 'stid o' smashin' it? You didn't know its value, that's why!"

"Neither did you, till you heard somebody say so! But I didn't break that little thing. Why, Mr. Lawrence set great store by that. I was always mighty careful not to touch it. Mrs. Sayre, she always told me to let it alone, she'd dust it herself."

"She wasn't afraid of a bit of housework, was she, Emma Lily?"

"Not fine, pretty work, like dustin' around in the bedrooms and livin' room. But o' course, she never bothered my kitchen." The sharp little face nodded with true New England pride. "Land sake, here comes Mrs. Gray, and that new boarder with her."

The inquest had been adjourned, for the next move must include the presence of Barker Hazelton, Fraser had decided. It was late afternoon, and as the crowds slowly, and rather unwillingly dispersed from the cottage, Sarah Gray and Mrs. Trent, sauntered across the grass toward the Busby house.

"I want to speak to you, Emma Lily," began the mistress of Gray Porches, in her straightforward way, "you're out of a place now—"

"Yes'm, and they ain't no one I'd ruther work for than you, Mrs. Gray. I say, they ain't no one—but,

somehow, I can't seemin'ly put my mind on such things just now—"

"Certn'ly not!" broke in Miss Busby, and Emma Lily glared at her, for she understood the hidden hint as to "pickins."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Mrs. Gray. "And I don't mean to hurry you, but when you feel to do so, Emma Lily, you come see me about it, will you?"

At the nodded assent, the boarding house landlady hurried off toward home, but Mrs. Trent lingered a moment, looking interestedly at the two typical village women before her.

"Tell me a little about the people here," she said, in a neighborly way. "I only came up from New York yesterday, and it's startling to be plunged right into the heart of a tragedy like this!"

"It must be awful, ma'am," conceded Emma Lily, but Miss Busby took up the conversation. There was little feeling of caste in New Midian, and Lizzie Busby was quite willing to hobnob with the Lawrence servant, but when it came to talking to the city boarders, Emma Lily must be put in her place.

"Yes, Mrs. Trent," the Busybody said, briskly, "I know just how you feel, I do. Here, you come up to a peaceful country village for a summer sojourn, and right under your very nose comes this awful thing! It ain't usual, such things ain't. Why, we never had so much as a robbery before. And

now a murder—a double murder—well, it's beyond all!"

"You just express it, Miss Busby," Mrs. Trent agreed, "it is certainly beyond all. Had these people any enemies?"

"Not one! Everybody in town loved 'em both."

And then the village Busybody gave a full account of all that was known of the victims of the tragic and mysterious fate.

"What about that man you saw prowling round?" Mrs. Trent asked. "I'm no detective, but it does seem to me he ought to be looked up."

"Yes," nodded Miss Busby, "but, if you ask me, I think they won't do anything about him till they check up on Bark Hazelton."

"A young man, is he?" Mrs. Trent inquired.

"Yes, one of our best summer people. Lives up on the hill yonder, and a first-rate young fellow, except for a blazing temper."

"I suppose they'll suspect him on account of that temper," Mrs. Trent observed. "People jump at conclusions so. Now, I should look up the queer man. You said he looked queer, didn't you?"

"Yes," Miss Busby assented. "But I don't know why he looked queer, I can't make it out to myself. He seemed—he seemed so—so—"

"Brutish?" suggested Mrs. Trent.

"Oh, no, rather the other way. Sort of embarrassed—"

Mrs. Trent smiled involuntarily.

"If he looked embarrassed," she said, "I don't wonder you called him queer. Well, I must go on home. It's lovely at Gray Porches, I'm booked for two weeks, but I'm not sure I want to stay after this—"

"Oh, do stay," said Lizzie Busby, cordially. "You'll come to love the place, and after the—the funeral and all, you needn't be mixed up in this thing at all. They'll never find the murderer. If it was that queer man, he's miles away by this time, and—who else could it have been?"

"Young Hazelton?" suggested Mrs. Trent, inquiringly.

"No! never Bark Hazelton. But he'll prove his alibi, I'm sure. I know Bark, he's fiery and all, but he'd never kill anybody, indeed he wouldn't."

"I'll agree to that!" broke in a man's voice, and Dave Stanhope appeared just as Mrs. Trent was leaving. She paused as Miss Busby murmured a word of introduction.

"I remember you, Mr. Stanhope," the lady said. "You were on my train from New York, yesterday."

"Yes, I was, and I want to confess, I picked up a magazine you left behind you. A *Carnival*. Or wasn't it yours?"

"If it was left behind, you surely had a right to it," she smiled. "But it wasn't mine. Perhaps it belonged to Miss Hemingway."

"Well, I took it, and it contained a most interesting story by poor Nevin Lawrence. Have you read it?"

"No, but I will. One feels a new interest in his writings now. What's your opinion, Mr. Stanhope, as to the—the mystery?"

"How women steer clear of the word murder," thought Stanhope to himself, but he said, "I haven't a real opinion, as yet. I'm on my way to the station to meet my friend Hazelton, he may know something evidential."

Stanhope spoke with great dignity, for he wanted no comment on Barker from these women. He had come over to see Emma Lily about some household matters pertaining to Woodbine cottage, now in the hands of the police, and he was impatient of any interruption.

So, making known his errand, he bowed courteously to the other two and carried Emma Lily off with him.

When Barker Hazelton swung himself off the train, he was met by Fraser and Lewis as well as by Dave Stanhope.

He looked inquiringly at the other two as he smiled at Stanhope.

"What's it all about?" he said, as they all got into the Hazelton car.

It had been agreed upon that Barker should not be questioned until he was at home and in the presence of his father. But it was expected that he would have heard of the tragedy.

"Haven't you heard of the murder?" Fraser asked him, bluntly.

"No, what murder?"

The others watched him closely. Both Fraser and Lewis felt sure he was bluffing, but Stanhope, naturally prejudiced in Barker's favor, thought his surprise was sincere.

The main details were told to him, he was advised to say little, and in a bewildered state of mind Barker Hazelton entered his own home.

A few minutes later, in his father's presence, he was asked questions that startled him. It began to dawn upon him that he was looked upon as a possible suspect in this terrible crime.

"What!" he fairly yelled; "do you mean to say that *I* am implicated in this thing? Why, I'll kick you out of this house! I'll—"

"Hush, Barker," said his father, "such talk won't get you anywhere. Now, answer these questions quietly—"

"Quietly? Would you be quiet if any one accused you—"

"But, Mr. Hazelton," Fraser broke in, "try to realize that your blustering carries no weight with us. Indeed, it rather militates against you."

"Behave yourself, Bark," Stanhope said to him, in a friendly way. "Take my advice, boy, and answer the questions in a few words and without comment."

Barker looked at him and his glance was a queer mixture of scorn and conciliation.

"I'll answer what I choose and as I choose," he said, and a look of sullenness spread over his face.

He was a splendid specimen of humanity, athletic of build and most comely of face. His head was flung back with an air of defiance but in his gray eyes there lurked a hint of unrest, of uncertainty, and his firm, strong mouth quivered as he looked at his father.

Amos Hazelton had said almost nothing, but his eyes, as they rested on his son were troubled. He had watched Barker closely, hoping to read his innermost thoughts, but he was not satisfied with what he read. He looked at the twitching fingers, the restlessly moving feet, the nervous movements of the body, and he felt convinced that whatever might be the awful truth yet to be discovered, Barker knew at least something of it, and something that he did not propose to reveal.

"What about it, dad?" the son said, at last,

noticing his father's scrutiny. "Are you, too, condemning me unheard?"

Amos Hazelton winced. Had he done that? he asked himself.

"No, Barker," he said, gravely. "But I want you to conduct yourself like a man—not like an untrained cub—"

It was an unfortunate expression.

Barker's eyes smouldered, and then blazed into lightning flashes, as he returned:

"Thank you. I will. I am a man, though my father treats me like a boy. I am twenty-six years old—old enough to keep my own counsel and follow my own way, without advice from anybody. Go on, Mr. Fraser, what do you want to know?"

"You were at Mr. Lawrence's house last night?"

"Don't be idiotic! You know I was! Go on."

Barker's face was stern now. He was still deeply enraged, that was apparent, but he had ceased his nervous movements, and sat quietly alert, like a wild beast waiting to spring.

Fraser's manner instinctively changed.

"Will you tell us of your interview?"

"Certainly I will. But I cannot speak ill of the dead—otherwise I should tell you that I was displeased with the way Mr. Lawrence treated me—"

"Ah, you were displeased at his treatment, were you?"

"I was. Very much so." Barker folded his arms and awaited the next query.

But Lewis, the detective, was not at all satisfied with Fraser's mildness and he broke in with:

"And so you quarreled with him?"

"I did." Barker replied.

"And you left him in anger?"

"I did."

"And you returned home, and later at night you went back to his house—to Mr. Lawrence's house, and you shot him, and because his sister discovered you, you shot her too. Don't dare deny it!"

Lewis leaned forward, and gazed into Barker's face. He felt sure this was the way to treat this unlicked cub, this boy, whom even his father doubted.

For there was a look on Amos Hazelton's face that betokened a fear for his son.

A splendid man was the elder Hazelton. A fine upright character, and, moreover, of a frank, open countenance. Not his a suave, diplomatic air, or an inscrutable expression. His feelings always showed themselves, and just now he who ran might read that he distrusted his son's veracity, doubted his son's integrity, perhaps even suspected his son's guilt.

They were totally unlike, this father and son, and Stanhope, loving them both, trembled as he feared the effect to this lack of harmony between them.

"I don't deny it," Barker returned, quietly, but his face was white and his lip quivered. "I don't deny it, because I scorn to deny it! You dare accuse me of this thing! Me!" He rose, and towered above his accuser. "You must be out of your mind! But I refuse to speak to *you*. I will get counsel—that is the proper thing, isn't it, Dave?" he almost smiled as he turned to Stanhope.

"Yes, but I'll look after that, Bark. You leave it to me."

Stanhope was bewildered by the boy's attitude. He had expected vehement denials, loud protestations, and he didn't know whether to be relieved or further alarmed at this sudden acceptance of the situation.

"Never mind the theatricals, Mr. Hazelton," Lewis said, "as I told you, they don't help you any. The guiltiest person on earth would adopt that same scornful attitude. But it doesn't carry any weight with us. We're used to it."

"Give me the floor, Lewis," Fraser asked; "let me ask a few questions, please. Now, Mr. Hazelton, did you leave Mr. Lawrence angry at you, or you at him?"

"Both," Barker returned, succinctly.

"And came straight home?"

"By no means. I went to make a call."

"On whom?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then, "on Miss Gladys Lee."

"In the village?"

"Yes."

"And you staid there, how long?"

"Until about eleven, I should say. I can't tell you more exactly."

"That will do. And from Miss Lee's house you came straight home?"

"Straight."

"Didn't go back to Mr. Lawrence's?"

"I did not."

Again Lewis interrupted. He had a *flair* for the psychological moment, and whether Fraser approved or not, he was determined to speak.

"But you started out again, later" Lewis cried, "about two o'clock you were back at Mr. Lawrence's house, standing about, outside his library window!"

"I was not."

"You were. Your footprints are there." This was a wild shot on Lewis' part, but he chanced it. "Let me see the soles of your shoes."

Slowly Barker Hazelton raised his right foot and held it so that Lewis could see the sole. The foot was not a small one, and it was not without a touch of insolence that its owner held it within a few inches of Lewis' face. More than one observer

of the scene felt that it would take but a word to send that foot smashing into that inquisitive face.

But nothing untoward happened.

"You sometimes wear rubber heels?" Lewis asked, for to his intense disappointment he saw none.

"Never, except on tennis or other rubber-soled shoes. Why?"

Lewis was baffled and chagrined.

Fraser, on the other hand, didn't feel at all certain that this was an alibi for Barker Hazelton. He was suspicious of sudden frankness, and he reasoned that if young Hazelton did this thing, he was quite capable of having used disguising shoes, and of taking them to New York that day for disposal. With this in mind, he made no request to search Barker's stock of footwear.

"Have you a long rain coat?" asked Fraser ruminatively.

"No, I detest raincoats," Barker returned.

"Well, a long motor coat—or overcoat?"

"Why, I've several topcoats—fairly, but not especially long. But, look them over. My entire wardrobe is at your disposal."

"I think Mr. Hazelton should be told of the man Miss Busby described," Stanhope remarked. "He may be able to identify him."

"Yes, by looking in the mirror!" said Lewis, bluntly. "Why, a neighbor, Miss Busby, says she

saw a man prowling round about two o'clock. He wore a long coat and a slouch hat and we have his footprints."

"Well, the hat and coat aren't mine—are the footprints?" Barker had returned to his insolent manner.

"We don't know yet," put in Fraser. "I see by Mr. Lewis' face that he thinks they are not. But they are about your size."

"Oh, come now, that's not much to go on. More'n half the men in the world probably have feet my size. Now, if you have nothing more definite than that on which to hang my accusation, I propose we call this interview off. I shan't run away. You can find me here whenever you want me to try on shoes."

"Don't be flippant, Barker," said his father. He had scarce spoken before. "Please take this matter seriously."

Barker stared at him.

"Yes," he responded, slowly; "I should say I am the one to take it seriously, when my own father is against me. But, I repeat, unless you men have something further to accuse, I don't see the use of prolonging this conversation."

"It isn't for us to accuse, it's for you to excuse," said Fraser, with the air of getting off a good thing. "What we ask you for is your alibi. Have you got one?"

"Innocent men don't have to have alibis," re-

turned their unsatisfactory suspect. "I state I returned home last night, soon after eleven o'clock. As you say this crime took place about two, I can't see how or why you connect me with it."

"Have you any one to corroborate your statement?"

"Not unless someone here at home saw or heard me come in last night."

Fraser looked questioningly at the elder Hazelton.

"I did," he said slowly. "I heard my son come in with his latchkey, some time after eleven."

"How long after?" Fraser looked suspicious.

"Not more than twenty or twenty-five minutes. I was in bed myself, but I was not asleep. But one always knows about what time it is."

"Then," and Fraser seemed to be suddenly determined, "I think we will look a little further for the man with the rubber heels, before we ask more questions of Mr. Barker Hazelton. But we shall expect to find him here when we want him."

"Always at your service," said Barker, with a courtly bow that made Fraser feel a little foolish.

But the next moment came a telephone call for Lewis, and they all waited as he left the room to answer it.

And when he returned, his face bore a mingled look of satisfaction and bewilderment.

"What do you think?" he cried, explosively.

"Those footprints are Mr. Lawrence's own! Our man down there has overhauled Mr. Lawrence's shoe closet, and nearly all his shoes have that same stamped rubber heel, and are the same size, and exactly fit the footprints! So we need look no further for our 'rubber heeled man' and I suggest that we ask Mr. Hazelton to go with us to the scene of the crime. One word more," and he turned to Amos Hazelton. "You heard your son come in last night. Did you hear him go out again later?"

There was a tense silence. Amos Hazelton's eyes were cast down. After a moment he raised them, and looked Lewis straight in the face.

"Yes," he said, "I did."

"At what time?"

"I don't know. Soon after midnight, I think."

"That will do."

CHAPTER VII

THE WHITE-FACED MAN

"THERE seems to be a deadlock," Barker Hazelton said.

He spoke in calm, even tones, and looked straight at his father, with an expressionless face.

"There does," the elder Hazelton returned. "I advise you, Barker, to stick to the truth. And, I say to you Mr. Fraser, that I stand back of my son, whatever happens. If you suspect him in any way, come to me with your complaints. If you have or think you have any evidence against him tell me of it. Please do nothing definite until you have informed me of your intentions. It may be that I have no right to ask this, but I do ask it, and I trust my wishes may be respected."

It was a strange speech. And the attitude between father and son was a strange one. They looked at each other, yet it was impossible to read from their faces what their thoughts were.

Fraser concluded that the two were not on good terms with each other, but Lewis felt sure that they shared a secret and intended to conceal it.

Stanhope, knowing the pair better, and knowing that though they were unlike and even uncongenial,

they were staunchly loyal-hearted, desired only that the visitors should get away and give him an opportunity to talk to his friends alone.

"All right, Mr. Hazelton," Fraser answered him. "Now, I'll be frank with you. As it turns out that the footprints in the flower-bed are Mr. Lawrence's own, we must conclude that he merely stepped out there to look after the plants or some such matter. So far as I can see there's no way to connect up those footprints with anybody else. I can't dope out anybody's stealing a pair of Nevin Lawrence's shoes in order to make those footprints."

"I can," interrupted Lewis. "I think it was a clever dodge of the murderer's."

"Oh, you do!" and Barker Hazelton turned on him; "well, go on—how did he work his clever dodge?"

"Why, he found a chance to get a pair of Mr. Lawrence's shoes, on the sly—"

"Not an easy thing to do, I should say—but go on."

"And then, he put them on and went there, late at night. He peered in at the window—there are finger marks to show that—and then he entered the house."

"The shoes being merely to disguise his own footprints?" Barker seemed interested.

"Yes, exactly. And a clever dodge, I call it."

"Do you know, it seems idiotic to me," Barker said; "why not any shoes not his own?"

"Because they could be traced—oh, it was the work of a deep, calculating mind."

"It sure was," Barker agreed. "But I can't think how he managed to abstract the shoes."

Lewis looked at him sharply. He was getting more and more sure that Barker had done this very thing, and he was glad to pursue the subject.

"Easy enough," he returned. "Say they were both members of the Country Club. Say that they both kept extra shoes and other apparel in their lockers, even that Mr. Lawrence left a pair of his shoes there while he wore his tennis shoes, intending to change before he went home. And when he went to change, his shoes were gone."

"Ingenious," and Barker nodded his head, with an ironical grin. "But if I'd found a pair of nearly new shoes missing, I'd raise a howl."

"Of course you would," said Lewis, blandly, "but Mr. Lawrence was a quiet man. And, too, probably he did raise a howl, among the attendants, but what good did it do? The shoes were gone."

Stanhope pondered. The idea of stealing the shoes from the club dressing room was fantastic, yet what other suggestion could he make? No burglar would have secured the shoes before going to commit his depredations; no casual friend or acquaintance

could have abstracted them from Lawrence's own bedroom. Yet it was too absurd to think of the club proposition.

"No," he said, decidedly, "your theory can't be right Mr. Lewis. If those footprints were unquestionably made by Mr. Lawrence's shoes, then those shoes were on Mr. Lawrence's feet. In that case the shoes can be found."

"Let us go down to the Lawrence house, then, and see if they have been," and Fraser rose with an air of finality. "I'll ask you to go along, Mr. Hazelton," he turned to Barker. "And, you, sir, if you wish," he added to the father.

"No," said Amos Hazelton, "I don't want to go, but I'll ask my friend Mr. Stanhope to represent me. Good-by, Barker," he held out his hand to his son, and with a firm hand clasp, the two parted.

Detective Lewis watched them keenly, for he hoped to gain from their manner an insight into their mutual secret, if they had one.

He had a queer notion that Amos Hazelton's frankness in admitting Barker's later departure from the house was part of their line of defence, though he couldn't yet quite see through it.

Fraser's car took them straight down to the Woodbine cottage. It was dusk now, and as they neared the house, they saw a man coming away from it.

He walked with a furtive air, and as if undecided which way to go.

Suddenly Stanhope recognized him for the "white-faced man."

"That's the chap," he exclaimed, "who called to see if he recognized the bodies. I wonder who he is."

"Him?" Fraser spoke scornfully. "I know him. He's from over my way—Beechville way."

"Native?"

"Oh, no, summer boarder. Been up here a few weeks, I think. He's a sort of harmless nonentity. I know little of him."

"He came up from New York last night on the same train I did," went on Stanhope. "Then this morning he was interested in the dead people, and now he's prowling round here again."

"And quite in keeping with what I know of him." Fraser returned, carelessly. "He spends most of his time roaming round the country. Boards at the Inn in Beechville. He's not the murderer, if that's what's on your mind, Mr. Stanhope."

"It isn't," Barker cried out, suddenly. "What's on Mr. Stanhope's mind is a fear that I'm the murderer. Now, I propose to prove to him that I'm not."

With almost a belligerent air the young man got out of the car and strode into the cottage.

The policeman on guard admitted them, and

Lewis at once beckoned them all upstairs. He had strong faith in the sudden confrontation of Barker with the scene of the crime, and expected results.

Nor was he disappointed.

Barker Hazelton stared about with a terrified air.

"My God!" he exclaimed, "is this where it happened?"

"You ought to know!" said Lewis, brutally, pushing him into Mrs. Sayre's room.

The bodies had been taken away to the village undertaker's rooms, and though untouched in the main, the rooms had been tidied and the beds properly made up.

Yet over all seemed to hang a sinister haze, a cloud of mystery which could not be dispersed. Even the dainty yellow curtains fluttering in the soft evening breeze, had a ghostly, haunting effect, and the white bed seemed mutely calling for its martyred occupant.

Barker Hazelton shuddered through all his strong frame. His lip quivered and he flung his hands up to his eyes as if to shut out some dreadful memory.

Lewis gave a quick nod of satisfaction. All was going as he had expected. Another moment would doubtless bring a confession.

Full of his project he seized Barker's arm and rushed him on into Lawrence's room.

"And here's where you killed the other one!" he cried, in a tense, triumphant voice.

And then Barker turned on him.

"You hound!" he cried, "you let me alone! I am stunned with grief and horror at this thing, and then you come along with your leering, ghoulish face, trying to trap me! Get away from me, I tell you, before I make you do so!"

"Don't bluster," Lewis said, calmly standing his ground. "I ought to tell you that anything you say may be used against you—"

"Shut up!" Barker shouted; "another word of that sort and I'll pitch you out of that window!—Mr. Fraser," he turned to the coroner, "who broke that statuette?"

He pointed to the bits of the Tanagra figurine, which, in a box, was still on the bedroom table.

"We don't know," Fraser watched him intently.

"Find that out, and you've got your murderer." Barker said quietly.

"Bluff, sheer bluff," Lewis said, grinning openly. "But you can't put it over, Mr. Hazelton. Never mind the little image, where's the revolver you used?"

But the manœuvre of sudden questioning, so often useful, did not altogether work in this case.

"Revolver?" Barker said, in a tone of casual inquiry, "now, really, my dear sir, since I didn't

do the shooting—at least, since I haven't as yet confessed to it—you can't expect me to tell you anything about the weapon."

Fraser saw that Lewis' mode of attack would get small results, and he interrupted.

"I say, Mr. Hazelton, just why do you think the little statue is mixed up in this thing?"

"I don't think it, I know it," the young man replied, and looked Fraser straight in the face. "But you see, I hold an anomalous position. I'd like to help you solve this mystery, I vow I would, but how can I, when I'm suspected myself?"

"Oh, not suspected, exactly," Fraser said; placatingly; "we're just feeling our way."

"Well, if your feelings lead you toward me, say so—"

"We have said so," put in Lewis, dryly.

"*You* have," Barker corrected, "I'm not so sure Mr. Fraser has!"

"Your whole attitude is proof to my eyes," Lewis went on. "Here you are shaking and shuddering, your mouth twitching and your hands tightly clenched—"

It was all true. Had Barker Hazelton been the guiltiest criminal that ever was confronted with the scene of his crime, he could have acted no more horrified, even terrified, than he now did.

His eyes rolled from one side of the room to the

other, he turned his head quickly, now and then, as if at a sudden thought. He even scrutinized the furniture and carpet, for all the world as if fearful of having left some clue behind him that yet might prove his guilt.

But Stanhope read all this nervous agitation differently from the other observers. He believed, or tried to believe, that Barker was merely stunned by the tragedy, the first to come into his hitherto happy, carefree life.

At any rate, he was not at all ready to believe the worst, and he longed to get Barker home, where he could talk to him alone.

So he suggested that as none of them had eaten an evening meal, the session be adjourned till the next day.

"I'll be responsible for Mr. Hazelton's appearance whenever you want him," Stanhope said, and after some further hesitation, the investigators permitted Hazelton and Stanhope to depart.

"Hop into the car, Bark," Stanhope said, and in Lewis' car, which he offered them, the two men started for Hazel Hill.

Barker was taciturn and Dave did not break the silence.

As they neared the home of Gladys Lee, Hazelton told the chauffeur to stop there.

Stanhope was about to remonstrate, then thought better of that and said nothing.

As they stopped at the little house, Barker said to the chauffeur: "wait a minute," and then he went up the garden path.

But in less than a minute he was back, and in the car again.

"She couldn't see me," he said, briefly, and lapsed again into silence.

After dinner the two Hazeltons and their guest forgathered in the library, and Stanhope fervently hoped that they would "get somewhere."

He was so anxious to investigate the whole matter; so anxious for frank and free statements from Barker, and so very anxious for help and sympathy from Amos, yet he feared that these two strange, almost eccentric men would prove obstinate and difficult to deal with.

One trouble was, Stanhope himself didn't know whether he felt entirely sure of Barker's innocence, and he was almost certain that Amos did not.

So the conference began rather inauspiciously. Each seemed to be on guard, each seemed unwilling to speak his mind.

Finally Stanhope said:

"Look here, you two. I'm going to speak right out in meeting. A terrible thing has happened. Barker is being questioned about it. Amos, you will be

questioned further. Now, I am keen on detective work, I should be only too glad to take up this matter and thrash it out, but I won't do that unless you both want me to, and I beg—I must insist that you answer me frankly and tell me the truth, and all the truth."

"Which of us do you want to speak first?" Barker inquired, not flippantly, but seriously, as if a lot depended on the answer.

"You, Amos," and after an instant's hesitation Stanhope turned to the elder man.

"Well, I will," and Hazelton straightened up in his chair as if about to throw off a heavy burden.

"I've been brooding over this thing while you two were down there. And I can't see any way to look, except toward Barker. Now, wait a minute, this doesn't mean that I'm condemning or suspecting my own son, but I want his word that he had nothing to do with the affair."

"That isn't telling your story, dad," Barker said, and his fine face was frowning as he looked at his father.

"Very well, then, my story is this. I know you went down to the village last evening. I know you came back shortly after eleven. I know you went out again, and down toward the village. This was soon after midnight. You returned much later."

"At what hour?" asked Barker, in a smooth, even tone.

"I don't know. It didn't occur to me to look. I had no premonition of what to-day would bring forth."

"But you said one always knows about what time it is."

"Then, my impression would be that it was after two o'clock."

"You had been awake all the time?"

"Yes."

"Trying to get to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Don't you know that hours seem almost interminable under those conditions? It may have been much earlier."

"It may have been."

Father and son looked at each other.

"Dad," Barker said, "if you had looked at the time when I came in, you could establish my alibi."

"I think I heard you say," Amos Hazelton spoke coldly, "that innocent men do not need alibis."

"Is this an inquest?" Stanhope broke in. "Are you two coroner and witness? What do you mean by such talk? Such attitudes! Amos, wake up. You antagonize Barker when you act like that. You know him well enough—"

"I do indeed," the father said, bitterly. "I know his fiery temper, his stubborn, obstinate disposition, his touchy pride, his pig-headed determination—"

"All of which traits he inherits from you," Stanhope said, speaking sternly. "You two love each other, but these very attributes and instincts that you have in common prevent your true understanding of each other."

"Now, you are at a crisis. This is a dangerous, a terrible situation that confronts us. Irrespective of all else, unless you two work together, unless you are absolutely at one, it will mean certain disaster of one sort or another."

"But I told those police people that I was back of Barker in any emergency," said Amos, defensively.

"I know it," Stanhope looked at him accusingly, "but how did you tell them? As if it were wrung from you! As if you were back of the boy only because it was your paternal duty. Not because you believe in him, and trust him—"

"Because he doesn't do that," Barker broke in. "He never believes me—he never trusts me—"

"Because time after time you have shattered my belief in you—you have betrayed my trust in you."

Barker's eyes fell, and Amos bowed his head on his hand.

"Well, well," Stanhope said, "I know what a little rascal Bark was as a boy, and he hasn't entirely outgrown it. But we must forget that in the present dilemma. I repeat, you two must start out afresh,

must stand shoulder to shoulder, or I can't pull you through."

"Through what?" said Barker, suddenly.

"Through a possible accusation, arrest, trial," said Stanhope, gravely. "Now, wait a minute, before you fly off the handle. As I see it, this is one of those mysterious crimes, with no definite way to look for the criminal. Wherefore, if they get what they think even a plausible, even a possible suspect, they will make it very hard for him. Just the fact that you quarreled with Lawrence, that you are the last one known to have seen him, that you came home and went back to the village again later, that you were away all day to-day—all these things, each unimportant in itself, combine to make enough to warrant your arrest, if the authorities choose. It matters not how innocent you may be, if they fasten it on you, and can find no other suspect, I tell you it will go hard with you. I can hope to pull you through, but only if I have the help and sympathy of you both and you are in sympathy and harmony with each other. Please try to realize this, both of you. I'm not talking lightly—I see the seriousness of the danger."

"I haven't heard Barker's story yet," said Amos, after a pause.

"Here it is, then;" and Barker began: "I went to see Mr. Lawrence to have a final chat with him about that club business. As you both know, it

isn't only the prohibition question, but there are other basic principles in the club constitution that he wanted to change, and a lot of us younger fellows don't. Anyway, I went to talk over all those things with him, and he—well, he wasn't very nice. That is, he was nice enough, polite and all that, but he was like a rock. Nothing could alter or even alleviate his old-fashioned, old-fogy ideas and opinions. I coaxed, I plead, and finally, of course, I got mad, and we had a pretty high old quarrel."

"Was Lawrence angry?"

"In his way. He didn't bluster as I did, but he had that quiet, maddening way of being so sure of himself and his platform and his constituents and his ultimate victory, that I—well I had already lost my temper and I guess I lost my head."

"Did you strike him?" asked his father.

"I did not, why should I do that? I'm not a silly baby. But I said things—and so did he—"

"Well," said Stanhope, "what was the outcome?"

"Oh, practically nothing. A drawn game. We exhausted our words I guess—anyway, I was tired of it, and I just left—we didn't even say good night."

"Where did you go?"

"Over to see Gladys." This a little defiantly.

"At that hour?" Amos raised his eyebrows.

"Oh, it wasn't late. Only about ten or so."

"And did she soothe your ruffled feathers?" It was this little sacracstic touch of Amos' that always irritated his son.

"Did she? She did not! Gladys is no molly-coddle. She bawled me out roundly for being so foolish as to lose my temper while with Lawrence. Said I would have done much better for myself and my cause to have been diplomatic and argued the thing out quietly with him. Said she'd see him herself.

Barker stopped short and flushed a dull red.

"Well, go on," said his father, sharply. "She said she'd see him for you, did she? Kind of her."

Stanhope sighed in despair. How could he ever harmonize these two discordant natures?

"Look here, dad," Barker spoke quietly now, "it will be wiser and better for all concerned if you leave her name out of our conversation."

"For heaven's sake, do!" cried Stanhope. "Let that matter wait over till we are out of these other woods. You must! You two don't realize—"

"You've said that before," Barker said, moodily. "To go on with my story. I quarreled with Gladys as I had with Lawrence. I left her in a huff, flung off without a good night, and came home and went to bed—that was soon after eleven. Then I couldn't sleep, but I was more troubled about the girl than about the man I had quarreled with.

"I tossed about for an hour and then I got up and dressed and went out to walk about. The night was pleasant—moonlight and all that, and I started down toward the village not knowing whether I'd go all the way or not. I did go all the way. I walked by Gladys' house, thinking if there was a light in her window I'd throw a pebble at it and sing out a good night to her. But there wasn't, so—I came home."

"Directly?" asked his father.

"Almost. I walked around past Lawrence's, but I didn't stop there."

"You didn't?" Amos Hazelton looked into his son's eyes, and Stanhope knew that this was the vital test—the crucial moment.

And Barker Hazelton looked back into his father's eyes and said:

"I can't answer that—until I've spoken to—to somebody."

CHAPTER VIII

RUBBER HEELS

THE next morning Stanhope and Barker Hazelton started for the village.

Amos Hazelton stood on the porch as he said good-by to them.

"Barker," he said, "I leave this matter to you. It is your affair. You are my son, and you may call on me for anything you want, money, time, influence, sympathy—but you must stand or fall on your own recognizance. I neither believe nor disbelieve in your guilt or your innocence. You have been a disappointment to me in many ways but I love you and I am ready to fight for you if called upon to do so. To-day I shall go up to the White Mountains to see your mother and Nell. I don't want them to come down here while this excitement is on. They could do no good, and it would upset them so terribly. At any rate, I'm going up there and see what your mother thinks best for her to do."

"Good-by, dad," and Barker held out his hand. "I'm sorry I'm so unsatisfactory, but if—oh, well, never mind. Good-by."

Barker got into the car, Stanhope followed and they were off.

"I wish you and your father hit it off better," Stanhope said, as he lighted a cigar. "You're both such bricks, and yet—"

"It's all on account of Gladys," Barker said; "if father only knew her, only knew what a dear little thing she is. But he won't even meet her."

"You're serious this time, I suppose?"

"You bet I am! And, I say, Dave, can I go to Gladys' for a minute, before I show up at the Lawrence place?"

"I think not. I gave my word we'd be there at ten and it's about that now."

"All right," but Barker's face fell, and his nervous, fidgety manner returned.

"What's the matter with you?" Stanhope said, a little shortly. "You act so brave and sane at home, and when you get down here you begin to tremble and your lip quivers like a baby's!"

Hazelton didn't resent this, but answered, "I can't help that physical exhibition of nervousness. It's the curse of my life, Dave. I suppose I inherit it from mother—she's just like that. And dad is so self controlled. Well, I'll tell you one thing, the more I seem kerflummuxed, the cooler and more rational I am, really."

"All right, old chap. Now, before we get there, who is it you must see before you can make a clean

breast of your goings and comings night before last? Gladys? ”

“ Yes.” And then with a sudden burst of confidence, “ you see, she said she was going round to Lawrence’s after I left her.”

“ At eleven o’clock at night ! ”

“ Yep. That’s what she said. I don’t think she meant to go—I don’t believe she did go, but I’ve got to see her before I say what *I* did.”

“ Why? ”

“ Well, I should think you could see why. If she went there, late, and the detectives learn of it, first thing you know they’ll be bothering her to death with their fool questions, and I don’t want her mixed up in the thing at all.”

“ And you’ll perjure yourself before you’ll let her be bothered? ”

“ Sure, why not? ”

“ Barker, haven’t you any regard for the truth? ”

“ You bet I have! Such a high regard that I hate to waste it on those fool policemen! ”

And then they reached Woodbine cottage and were met at the door by “those fool policemen.”

Also awaiting them was Miss Eusby, quite evidently a star witness for the prosecution.

“ Good morning, Bark,” she said, looking at him curiously. “ They’re going to stage a play with you and me as chief actors.”

"All right, Miss Lizzie, let's get it over as soon as possible. What do I do?"

"Get into this, please," and Lewis proffered a long raincoat, and a soft slouch hat, which he had accumulated for the purpose.

Barker donned these things without remonstrance and then awaited further orders.

The orders being forthcoming he went outside, and stood on the flower-bed beneath the library window.

Miss Busby had scurried back to her home and sat in her window, the idea being to see if she could identify the figure of Barker Hazelton with the man she had seen in the night.

There was also an interested audience in the windows and on the verandas of Gray Porches.

Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Trent, who were becoming fast friends, watched absorbedly.

"Fine looking young chap," Mrs. Trent observed, gazing at Barker's stalwart figure.

"Yes," agreed the other, "but a scalawag, if ever there was one. They say he's incorrigible, his father can't do anything with him—never could."

"High tempered, I've heard."

"Frightfully so. Flies into a rage at the merest trifle. I'll bet a cookie he's mad now!"

And in truth, Barker was. He didn't mind the performance he was engaged in, he was willing to

give the detectives their way, but he did mind the group watching him, and he felt like a fool.

Released at last, he waited for Lizzie Busby to come over from her house. He met her before the others were within earshot. Indeed, he had gone a few steps toward her to reach her first.

Meeting her, he took her by the arm and walked by her side.

"Busybody," he said, in a low tone, "you say anything you want to, but remember this; I heard something you said to Nevin Lawrence as I came up the steps that night. You know the windows were open, your voice was raised a little, and—well, I heard you—that's all."

Miss Busby's whole attitude changed. Her important, superior air vanished and she looked scared, cowed.

But they were in the cottage now and Lewis eagerly asked her if she thought she recognized the mysterious night prowler she had seen.

"No," she said, slowly. "No, that man I saw wasn't Bark Hazelton."

"How can you be so sure?"

"The whole make-up was different. The man I saw was a heavier figger and a mite shorter. I can't say by feet and inches, but I do know the other was a little shorter. Bark is a very tall man, and that other one was tall but not *as* tall. And he

had a different set of his head on his shoulders. And his head was bigger."

"You seem sure of that big head."

"Yes, I am, that's what made the man look queer. Bark doesn't look queer—he's, why, normal. The other fellow was—well queer."

"That's easy," Lewis grunted. "Young Hazelton tried to disguise himself. That would explain the stooped attitude and perhaps the big head. He may have worn a wig."

"And I may have worn a hump on my back and asses' ears!" cried Hazelton, exasperated beyond measure. "But, I didn't! See here, if you've accusations to make and evidence to prove them, go ahead, but don't trump up fairy tales! Miss Busby didn't recognize me as the 'queer man' so I think you'll have to look further for him. But why wasn't it Mr. Lawrence himself? You've proved his shoes, he was a tall man—fairly tall—and as to the 'big head' that was doubtless due to the misleading effects of the flickering moonlight. A clouded moon can often distort shapes queerly."

"That's so, Barker," and Dave Stanhope nodded in affirmation. "You must admit, gentlemen, that behind fitful clouds, as I know the moon was on Friday night, it does make earthly objects appear weird and even uncanny. As Shakespeare put it, 'It makes a bush appear a bear.' Isn't that so?"

Fraser admitted there was something in this, but Lewis merely snorted his doubts.

"The trouble is," Fraser said, frankly, "there's no other way *to* look. Mr. Hazelton was the last person known to see Mr. Lawrence alive—"

"By heavens!" Barker cried, "if there's one phrase that makes me madder than another, it's that one! Somebody's got to be the last known to see a victim alive before his murderer arrives on the scene! You don't suppose the criminal is going to advertise his presence, as positively the last one! So the next to the last is picked on and accused! I was here, I did see Lawrence, I did quarrel with him, we did part in anger, but I didn't kill him!"

"Not then," said Lewis, in his taunting way, "but when you came down to the village on your second trip that night."

"Who saw me come here?" demanded Barker.

"Your father said you came."

"No. He only said I came down toward the village. You'll have to bring some witnesses."

"Perhaps we can do that."

"Have you any?"

"That's telling," and Lewis looked slyly wise.

"I think Mr. Hazelton is entitled to the truth," Fraser said, resolutely; "we have no witnesses, other than Miss Busby, as to any events of that night. Even more, we have made careful house to house

inquiries and no one was seen on the road or sidewalks all night long. In two houses, one at either end of this street, there was illness, and the people were up all night. They saw and heard no person or vehicle all night long. This does not entirely preclude the fact that there may have been such, but in the silence of the sickroom, at night, a wheel or a footstep would probably have been heard."

"And yet you say *I* came here."

"That's the puzzle, Mr. Hazelton. But I feel you ought to know that no one saw you on the road."

"Thank you," said Barker, with a preoccupied look. "But then how account for the queer man Miss Busby saw?"

"I'm not sure that man was not entirely a figment of Miss Busby's imagination—aided and abetted by the magic of the moonlight."

"But the footprints?"

"Those are undoubtedly Mr. Lawrence's own."

It was clear to be seen that Fraser and Lewis were diametrically opposed in their conclusions as well as in their methods.

Stanhope exulted over this. If these two were at loggerheads, they would probably get nowhere, and, as there seemed little if any real evidence, the case would doubtless eventually be dropped as an insoluble mystery.

Stanhope was most eager to go in himself for real

investigation, but he was held back by a lurking fear that Barker might be implicated—though his instinct told him the boy was innocent. However, he determined to make some further examination in those upstairs rooms, which were still kept locked against intruders.

Of course, he easily gained admission, and was still puttering around up there when word was brought him that they were all to repair to Gray Porches for luncheon.

Stanhope followed the others, and found his chair at the side of Barker's at the table where sat the newest arrivals of the house.

Stanhope, a good mixer, claimed acquaintance with Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Trent. Laughingly said, too, that he had known Miss Hemingway and Miss Lowe for ages, having come up from New York in the train with them.

Barker at once made friends with all, having on his most sunny mood and affable manners.

Mrs. Trent sat at his other side, and her rational business-like way of looking at things appealed to him. He hated fussy old women, but this lady was quick-witted and intelligent, and her short nods by way of assent instead of what he called palaver, made him ready and willing to converse with her.

This did not at all suit the pleasure of the three younger women at the table, and as soon as the meal

was over, they carried him off to a shady corner of a porch, supplied him with smoking materials and tried to build up a friendship, after the approved manner of summer boarders.

But he politely resisted their efforts, he gaily parried their pleas, and with a word of explanation to Fraser, he bade brief adieus and swung off down the road.

Stanhope took Fraser aside for a quiet talk.

"I've found out something," he began. I've been poking around among Mr. Lawrence's belongings—oh, I didn't really disturb anything—but I found out there are no shoes there that correspond to those footprints. Yes, they all have those rubber heels, with the same design. But they're all more worn than are the ones that made those footprints. You know that design of the star in the circle is exceedingly clear-cut and sharp in the prints. Well, all the shoes in the wardrobe, the ones that have that heel, and there are five pairs, are all more or less worn and blunted. Some are so run over that the design is effaced on one side. Some are worn more evenly. But not a pair has the design sharp and true as the footprints show it. What have you to say to that?"

"I say I think you are mistaken. We measured—"

"But, man, you've only to look at the shoes to see it! Measurement means nothing in this particu-

lar. All of Mr. Lawrence's shoes are too worn to have made those prints."

"Then somebody else had a new pair of his shoes, or—or he had another pair of newer shoes—over at the club, perhaps—"

"No, I telephoned over and there are no shoes of his there at all, except tennis shoes."

"Well what do *you* make of it?"

"I think they were not Lawrence's shoes, but some other person's."

"The same size, and made on the same last."

"That may be. Lots of men wear that size."

"But not lots of men wear that pattern of heel. I've investigated all New Midian."

"Then your murderer came from outside New Midian."

"Oho, I see! Your getting up this cock and bull story to divert suspicion from young Hazelton!"

"I'd do anything in my power to divert suspicion from Barker Hazelton, but this I tell you is true. Go and look for yourself. You can't say that sharp, clear imprints can be made with worn, dulled rubber heels!"

"Then I say that Mr. Lawrence had a new pair of those shoes, that somebody purloined them and wore them there that night, for the purpose of disguising his footprints, and that he then wore the

shoes away and has since concealed or destroyed them. What have you to say to that? ”

And Dave Stanhope had nothing to say.

The two men walked slowly back to the Woodbine. It was far pleasanter on the Gray Porches, but they had seen a man arriving at the cottage, whom Fraser knew to be the finger-print expert, in charge of the investigation of the window pane.

He had his photographs with him.

“There are many prints,” he said, “but they were all made by three people.” He pointed out his three sets of pictures. “Now, how you’re going to find the people who match up to these prints, I don’t know. But I rather imagine one set of prints belongs to the woman who washed the window. Their position on the glass gives me that impression.”

“That’s easily settled,” said Fraser. “Emma Lily, the maid of all work is now next door, staying with Mrs. Gray. I’ll have her over.”

Emma Lily was fetched and rather enjoyed the process of being finger-printed. To her mind it gave her a decided prestige, and she planned to tell Lizzie Busby about it in detail.

The result of the matter was that the prints in question were undoubtedly Emma Lily’s and she explained volubly how, when and why she had washed those windows.

She was sent back in triumph, bearing her palms

with her, in the shape of a fine set of her own fingerprints, and immediately became the heroine of Gray Porches for the rest of the afternoon.

Even Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Trent, though they had languidly declared themselves tired of the whole subject, condescended to inspect the prints and to ask all sorts of questions about the matter.

"And whose are the other prints?" Mrs. Trent inquired, with a show of reviving interest.

"I don't know, ma'am," replied Emma Lily. "And they don't know, but they suspect to find out."

The way Fraser took to find out, was to go at once in search of Barker Hazelton. That headstrong young man had told him he would be at Gladys Lee's house, and there Fraser went.

He did not ask Stanhope to accompany him, so that amateur detective went back to his browsing in the Lawrence home.

It may as well be stated right here that he found nothing he considered of any importance, and he drifted into the library and fell to reading the books he found there. It was a worthwhile selection and Dave soon became absorbed in a volume of beautiful poems, hitherto entirely unknown to him, though he was an omnivorous reader.

Fraser, reaching the Lee cottage, confronted the two young people sitting in a hammock on the vine-covered porch.

"Sorry to intrude," he said, grinning as they blushed a little, "but business is business. I'd like the finger prints of you two. No objections, I suppose?"

The expert had given Fraser the simple little outfit and the slight instruction necessary for getting the prints, and the now genial-faced coroner waited their response.

"Take mine, of course," Barker said, "but I can't see any reason for troubling the young lady."

"I can," rejoined Fraser, coolly, "and 'tain't a mite of trouble. Just tap your fingers right there, Miss Lee."

And before Barker could interfere further the thing was done.

His own were taken next, and Fraser went away with a slight word of thanks.

"I don't like it, Glad," Hazelton said, his eyes darkening.

"Well, we couldn't help ourselves. To refuse would have looked suspicious, and he'd have made us do it, anyway."

But Hazelton's troubled eyes darkened still more when in an incredibly short time Fraser returned and deliberately seated himself near the disturbed pair.

"Now," he said, "we've got to have this thing out. And it may as well be right here. We're shel-

tered from the passers by and its cool and comfortable. Your mother home, Miss Lee?"

"No, she isn't."

"Well, I only wanted her for a witness. But I see Mr. Stanhope coming along, and he'll do. To put this thing in a nutshell, there are, except for that servant girl, only two sets of fingerprints on the Lawrence's window, the one over the flower-bed, you know. And those two sets belong to you two people."

Stanhope arrived during the stillness that followed this statement.

He sat down near the two, who were still in the hammock, sitting side by side and with clasped hands.

"Speak out, Bark," Stanhope said. "It's the best way. You and Miss Lee would much better tell the absolute truth about that night. For, listen, boy, Emma Lily washed that window the day before the murder. There are no marks on it except hers and yours and Miss Lee's. These facts are incontrovertible. You can't get away from this evidence. You can't make up any yarns about it. So, out with the truth."

"I'll tell—" began Gladys, but Barker interrupted her.

"Let me talk," he said. "Miss Lee did go over to see Mr. Lawrence late that night. She did so, because she thought she could placate him and bring about a better feeling between him and myself."

"I'd prefer to hear Miss Lee tell about it herself," said Fraser, not ungently, and Gladys took up the tale.

"There's not much to tell," she said, simply.

Her little face was sweet and sincere of expression. Her pretty hair glistened like gold in the sunshine and her deep blue-gray eyes were fearless and straightforward.

But it was her manner that was appealing. She had a little bird-like tilt to her head, especially when asking a question, and she gestured much with her hands, though not in any theatrical way.

"You see," she said, and her tone was confiding, "we had quarreled—Barker and I had. Oh, that's nothing unusual, we often quarrel, just for the fun of making up," she threw a roguish smile at the young man, and striking her rosy palms together as she resumed, she said, "and you see, this time it was a terrible, *terrible* quarrel. So bad, that he went off home without making up! He never did that before. Now, you see, the quarrel was about Mr. Lawrence and the club presidency, but you know that?" again that captivating tilt of the little head.

"And when I found that Bark had really gone off mad, and was not coming back that night—sometimes," most confidently, "he just goes down the road, and then back again. Well, when I found he wasn't coming back, I decided to run over to Mr. Lawrence's and see what I could do."

"About what?"

"Why, about settling that club matter. Of course, I know all about it—I know a lot more about it than most of the club members, and I thought if I could talk to Mr. Lawrence I might influence him——" her little gesture and the nod of her head, made it seem likely she could have done so.

"Go on," said Fraser, briefly.

"So I went over there——" she spoke more slowly now, as if feeling her way. "And it was pretty dark in the house——"

"What time was this?"

"Oh, something after eleven, I don't know. That's not so very late."

"No; go on."

"Don't say 'go on' to me like that! I'm not a horse!"

Fraser had to smile at the pretty petulance, but he was on his guard, was Fraser, and he merely nodded.

"Well, there seemed to be nobody about, so I supposed they'd all gone to bed, and I came back."

"Without seeing anybody—I mean anybody of the Lawrence household?"

"No, not anybody."

CHAPTER IX

GLADYS LEE

FRASER didn't quite believe the girl. And yet, she looked so sweet and good, so little and appealing, he couldn't suspect her of crime or implication in a crime. It might be she was not telling the truth, that she had gone into the Lawrence house, and perhaps had interviewed Nevin Lawrence, but fearing consequences, had concluded to deny it.

However, her finger prints on the window pane were explained by the admitted fact that she had looked in at that window, and there was really nothing further in the way of evidence against her.

And a soft, pretty little thing like that! It was out of the question. Of course there was still Barker.

But his replies to Fraser's questions were indefinite and unsatisfactory.

"Why, yes," he said, "I did look in at that window, when I went to the house about nine o'clock. I had no special reason for doing so, except a casual curiosity to see if they were at home, and if they had visitors. I think, if you can't hang anything but those silly fingerprints on me, you'd better guess again."

Fraser looked at the two young people. He

prided himself on his ability to read faces, but this time he felt baffled.

He could scarcely think this fine, though high-tempered youth and this really lovely girl were mixed up in the worst murder he had ever known. And yet, he could think of no other way to look.

"I say, Fraser," put in Dave Stanhope, "why don't you let up on these kids? They won't run away, and there are, there must be other ways to look. Seek a motive. That foolishness about the club isn't enough to bring about a murder! You're crazy to put it up to these youngsters."

"I can't think Miss Lee is in it—not as a principal, anyway, but I suppose a fiery, hot-headed young man, who loses his head when he gets angry, is at least, a possibility."

"Then, leave it at that," said Stanhope, "Barker won't run away. And you try to find another suspect with a greater motive. Why, it may well have been somebody connected with the past life of the brother and sister. It may have been an enemy who has been tracking Lawrence down for years, and just found him up here. You see, the lack of knowledge of any sort about the past of these people is a queer thing in itself."

"No," Fraser said, slowly, "that isn't queer. There are lots of people in New Midian of whose life before they came here we know nothing. Nor do we

care. Only the idly curious are interested in such matters, and as everybody liked Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre, they cared nothing for their previous life. And it was no secret. I find they readily answered questions about it, but nobody wanted to ask details. Oh, I've inquired a lot among the village people, and I find one and all, repudiate the idea of any dark past. However, I have a few more stones to turn over, and I'll be about it. Don't leave town, Mr. Hazelton."

"No, I sha'n't," Barker said, and Fraser went away.

He went directly to the home of Miss Busby, and had a talk with her.

On the way he met the man whom Stanhope dubbed White Face.

As usual the man was very pale, and showed a furtive, cringing air as if afraid of some intangible menace.

On a sudden impulse Fraser stopped to speak to him.

"Good day," he said; "I'm told you went to the Lawrence house to look at the victims of the crime. Have you known them long?"

"I—I never knew them," said the man with a shudder. "I—I thought maybe I did—and so—"

His voice trailed away in a murmur, and Fraser

wondered whether his time wasn't wasted in talking to such a poor, spineless piece of humanity.

But he added, "you're from over my way, I think. Beechfield?"

"Yes, I'm up here on a little vacation."

"May I ask your name?"

"Me? Oh, I'm John Taylor. I'm from Chicago."

"Chicago. That's where Mr. Lawrence and his sister hailed from."

"So I heard. But I don't know 'em. I never saw 'em before. I'm sure of that."

But Fraser wasn't so sure. This man was queer—yet, of course, he couldn't be the queer man Miss Busby had seen, for he was a tall, big man. This chap was small, thin and a little bent. Not an old man, but his general effect was that of hopeless inefficiency. He could no more plan and carry out a crime than he could build a statehouse. He was, Fraser concluded, the most uninteresting character he had ever seen.

Yet, had the astute Fraser but known it, White Face loomed large in importance among the people connected with the Lawrence tragedy.

And he gave a hint of this.

"I don't suppose," he said, timidly, "I don't suppose it has occurred to you to—that is, to—"

"Well, to what? Speak out man. Don't stand there mumbling. I'm busy—"

"Yes—yes, I won't detain you—"

"Yes you will. You tell what you were about to say."

"Why, only what you must know already. What every detective knows. Has it come to you that you might look for—that is, look for—"

This time Fraser did not interrupt, but waited patiently for the finish.

It came in the merest whisper, "a woman."

"A woman," Fraser repeated, his thoughts flying back to Gladys Lee. "Why?"

"Why, because it's always a possibility. A woman has so many motives, jealousy, love, hatred, petty spite—" the man Taylor's voice trailed off in that maddening way he had.

"And haven't men such motives?"

"Not exactly. Men are bigger, they need a big, fierce motive. But a woman, now—"

Oh, nonsense, this crime is too big, too awful for a woman. Why, I've just been talking to a girl about it—"

"Oh, not a girl—I don't mean a girl—"

"Well, do you mean anybody, anybody definite? Have you Emma Lily in mind?"

Taylor looked scared.

"Oh, Lord, I haven't anybody in mind. Not

anybody special. Maybe I'm all wrong—like as not I am. Like as not. Like as not—”

Still muttering, he rambled away and Fraser let him go. He sized him up for a visionary, idle fellow, who loved to voice his vague, indefinite thoughts.

But he thought about him as he went on to Miss Busby's, and, arriving, he asked her if she had ever seen him.

“Yes, I have,” she said, in her decided way. “I've seen him a heap of times, wandering about like a lost soul. I don't think he's touched, exactly, but I think he's a sort of a nervous wreck. Anyway, he's not worth thinking about.”

“It couldn't have been he who was the queer man?”

“Good land, no!” and she laughed outright. “Why that queer man I saw would make two of that little rat.”

“Well, he advised me to look for the woman.”

This had a strange effect on Lizzie Busby.

“He did, did he?” she cried; “how utterly ridiculous!”

“You don't think—now—Miss Busby, that is just between us—you don't have the least suspicion of Emma Lily, do you?”

“Emma Lily! Well, I should say not! Why Emma Lily Stagg is one of the finest women I know—if she is a servant girl!”

“But she inherits quite a sum—”

"Oh, hush, you make me sick! Inherits! Do you suppose she would kill two people to get two thousand dollars? How about George Bailey? He inherits too."

"He has a sound alibi. But, never mind the money. Could Emma Lily have been—you know—sweet on Mr. Lawrence?"

Busybody Busby stared at him in silence for a moment, then she said:

"Now, look here. I know all the gossip of this town. I know more about everybody than anybody else knows. And there's no notion you could trump up more comical than that! Emma Lily! My heavens, Mr. Lawrence wouldn't have looked at her, except as a house-keeper. I guess you didn't know him!"

"No, of course, I didn't. Well, is there any woman you know of who—who admired Mr. Lawrence?"

Lizzie Busby pondered so long over this question that Fraser was surprised and eagerly awaited her answer.

"No," she said at last, "you're on the wrong tack. I don't know of any such—but maybe it's my duty to tell what I do know."

"Of course it is," Fraser said, quietly.

"Well, it's only this. And I shouldn't have spoken only you began about a woman. That little

Lee girl was at the Lawrence house very late that night."

"How late?"

"Well after midnight."

Fraser considered this. Gladys had said about eleven. And he felt there was a lot of difference between eleven and well after midnight

"You're sure?" he asked.

"Positive. I saw her myself."

"But that was before the queer man came."

"Oh, yes, he didn't come till about two. But we don't know that he went into the house at all."

"That's so. Now, Miss Busby, you can't think for a minute that a little scrap of a girl like that pretty Gladys Lee could possibly—"

"Oh, you men! You say, look for a woman, then if there's a hint toward one, you say, 'oh, such a pretty girl couldn't do anything wrong!' I don't say Gladys Lee killed those people, I don't say Barker Hazelton did, but I do say that you've nowhere else to turn your inquiries!"

"Except your queer man—"

"Don't call him *my* queer man! I did see him, looking in the window—"

"He left no fingerprints—unless he was young Hazelton in disguise."

"He might have been," Miss Lizzie said, musingly. "But I can't say and I won't say anything

bad about Barker. He's a fine chap, and I don't want to wrong him a mite. And another thing; I don't want you to tell Bark that I said I saw Gladys. I tell you, because I feel it my duty, but I don't think you need let on to Barker that I told you."

"No, Miss Lizzie, I won't. I have my eye on Gladys, and I'll find out more about her—"

"I'll tell you where to go for information. That Rosie Gale, she's George's sweetheart—George, the Lawrence chauffeur, you know—she works for Mrs. Lee, in her dressmaking. Now, Rosie, she's a good reliable girl, and she knows all there is to know about Gladys. Why don't you see her?"

"I will. And I'm glad you told me all you have, and I promise I'll never let Hazelton know who told me. Good day, Miss Lizzie."

Being a hot iron striker, Fraser went at once to the home of Rosie Gale. It was the village dinner time, and he hoped to find her at home.

He did, and she left her midday meal to talk to him.

Rosie was a wholesome looking, fair-haired girl, with wide blue eyes that seemed to challenge the world.

"Gladys Lee," she repeated, to Fraser's question, "why, I don't know anything of Gladys but good. She is one of the sweetest girls I know. She is generous, kind, truthful, daring—"

"Daring? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean she isn't afraid of anything—any danger. Why, she's crazy to be a motion picture actress, the kind that leaps over chasms and speeds in automobiles and shoots straight—"

"Shoots! Can that little girl shoot?"

"You bet she can. She just loves it—rifle, revolver—why she said once she'd like to fire off a cannon!"

"She looks so slight—"

"Ho, that's nothing. What girl isn't slight? But Glad is a hummer at all sorts of dangerous games. I've seen her do trapeze stunts that made my hair stand on end."

"H'm, now what about her disposition? Is she vindictive?"

"Gladys Lee? Not a bit of it. Forgiving and patient—unless she really gets her dander up. Once in a while she does that, and then fur flies, I tell you!"

"And what arouses this state of things?"

"Oh, something connected with some one else, most likely. She'll stand anything herself, but if anybody insults some one she loves, say, her mother, Glad turns into a regular wildcat."

"And anyone beside her mother?" ,

"No, I guess not, unless, Oh, yes, of course, her beau, Mr. Hazelton."

"Is he her beau?"

"Yes, he is, though his father isn't a bit happy

over it." Rosie giggled. "But, I say, what are you asking me all this for?"

"Don't be alarmed. You have told nothing but what everybody knows, isn't that so?"

"Why, yes, of course. Everybody who knows Gladys well, knows all that about her. But I don't like the way you dragged it out of me."

"Oh, come, now, I didn't do that. And anyway, I'll never tell that you told me anything at all."

Rosie's face cleared.

"All right then," she said, "for I don't want to lose my job with Gladys' mother."

"You sha'n't—not through anything I tell. Now, forget all this and run back and finish your dinner."

As Fraser walked away, he had much food for thought.

The greatest barrier to any suspicion of Gladys Lee was her sweet, gentle girlishness. Now this was counteracted by the knowledge that she was a fine shot, and loved to shoot! Could she have killed those two people? The idea was as untenable as ever, except for the information about the shooting, and also, for the revelation that she was ready to fight for those she loved. And she did love Barker Hazelton.

So Fraser pondered, as he walked back to Gray Porches to get his own luncheon.

The porches were full of chattering people, and

he took his usual seat between Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Trent.

Somehow these ladies had managed to interest him, doubtless because they were themselves so interested in the progress of events.

"I admit I did get rather tired of the horrible details," Mrs. Trent said to him once, "but now that it's all detective work, I find it absorbing. You are a wonderful worker, Mr. Fraser."

And with similar flattering wiles did Mrs. Endicott ply him, until it had become the usual thing for him to report to them any new bit of evidence he might find.

And yet there was little to be told them. He hinted at Gladys Lee, and both ladies spurned the idea as too utterly ridiculous to be considered.

But when he told them that she was expert with firearms, and of a daring, danger-loving disposition, they marveled.

"All the same," Mrs. Trent declared, "that child never did it. I've seen her, and I know she couldn't compass such a fearful thing."

"Barker Hazelton said a funny thing," observed Mrs. Endicott. "He said to find the one who smashed the little statuette, and you'd have the murderer."

"How ridiculous!" cried Mrs. Trent. "That

is, unless he just meant that in his haste the murderer knocked the thing over."

"What else could he mean?" asked Fraser, who was not very subtle.

"Why," explained Mrs. Trent, "I thought he might mean that the murderer had some reason for smashing the Tanagra figure. They're valuable, you know, and the criminal might have broken it out of sheer angry fury—"

"I don't see any sense in that," Fraser said. "If the thing is valuable, why not steal it?"

"Oh, he knocked it over accidentally," said Mrs. Endicott, impatiently, "such trifling gets you nowhere. Why don't you find some good clues, smart ones, like Sherlock Homes always found?"

"Not so easy to do," Fraser returned, smiling. "But we've some clues—the footprints, the fingerprints—"

"Fiddle-de-dee!" exclaimed Ben Gray, coming by, "those are no good. The crime was committed by a passing highwayman. I know we've never had one here before, but that's the only solution, and I wish you'd let it go at that. Suspicion of Barker Hazelton is foolish, and as to that little Lee girl, she wouldn't have the nerve, I don't care how scatter brained she is! Now, give it up, Fraser, call it person or persons unknown, and shut up shop. We all liked Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre, but they

wa'n't related to none of us, and while its a horrible thing, yet it won't do our village any good to harp on it for the rest of the summer. Now, we liked those people, and we treated them white while they were with us. Now, they've left a tidy bit to our library, and I say take the gift the gods provide, drop the whole case, and forget it."

"That's all very well, Ben," said Fraser, "and I understand you. You think it'll hurt your house and your business to have the case go on, and so for personal reasons you want it dropped, but—"

"I think Mr. Gray is right," Mrs. Trent said, in her decided way. "He speaks not only for his own business, but for the good of the whole village. It won't do any good to pursue this futile inquiry, and it will give this lovely little place a bad name. Do hush the matter up."

"Well, you see, Mrs. Trent, that ain't so easy as it sounds. Us as have sworn our oath to the government, to do all we can to keep law and order, we take it to include doing our utmost to punish crime. 'Specially such a horrible one as this. Why, I'd ought to be drummed out of the country if I laid down on this job. No, sir-ee! I'm going to do all I can. But if it was some stranger just passing through the village, and if he got clean away, why, then, of course, we can't get him. I've quite a strong belief in Lizzie Busby's queer man—leastways, I

did, till just recently, when I got started on a new tack. But give it up? Not on your life! And if it points much stronger to Barker Hazelton, why he'll have to stand trial, that's all. If he's really innocent, no harm can come to him."

The subject of this speech was at that moment saying pretty much the same thing to Dave Stanhope.

"Of course I didn't kill those people, Dave," Barker said, "and as I didn't, I'll pull through even if it comes to a trial."

"But if you can prove your innocence then, you can prove it now," Stanhope objected. "And the disgrace and danger of a trial would just about kill your mother."

"Oh, no it wouldn't. She'd have a few hysterics and then she'd be all right. But Lord knows, I don't want a trial, it's only—"

"As usual, you're thinking of Gladys."

"Yes, I am. Wouldn't you be? You must realize, old chap, that I love that little girl, and I'll go through fire and water for her, and, if necessary, I'll die for her."

Barker spoke solemnly, so much so, that Dave looked at him in surprise.

"Look here, old man, do you know anything more than you've told me?"

"No—except that I know Gladys. Few know the depths of fire and passion under that fluffy little

exterior. She has the strongest will and the most immovable determination I've ever seen. And she has a marvelous sense of justice—I don't mean revenge, but if she thought punishment was called for, she'd stop at nothing to bring it about."

"Now, see here, Barker, don't let's mince our words. Do you mean, for what else can you mean? that Gladys could have thought Nevin Lawrence was so unjust to you in that club matter, that justice required her to go there and kill him?"

"It does sound absurd, when you put it into words, doesn't it? But I'll have to admit, Dave, that it's the fear of some such thing that is knocking me galley west. I don't think it, I can't think it, yet there might have been circumstances that would bring that about. No, I don't suspect her—my little girl—but I must stand back of her if any one else suspects her."

"And your father said to remember he stands back of you."

"Ah, but that didn't mean if Gladys is in the game too. Dad would quickly retract that promise, if he knew I was shielding her. Oh, I'm no fool, I know father's attitude perfectly, but I know my own heart, and much as I love and respect dad, I'd leave this house forever rather than give up my little girl. You see, dad loves me, but he doesn't quite understand me. When I was a kid, I was an awful

liar, I really was. But it was always to get out from under father's wrath. If he'd been more lenient to my childish misdeeds, I'd have told the truth. But he was so stern, so uncompromising, that I lied, as the line of least resistance. I've outgrown the habit, I truly have, but father never will trust me. I believe he more than half thinks I killed those people."

"Oh, Barker, he can't."

"Well, he will, if Gladys is charged with it, and I confess to the crime."

"Now, look here, my dear boy, there is no more mistaken procedure than to confess a crime you did not commit, to shield another."

"May be a mistaken procedure, but it's the one I'm going to put over. If they so much as hint at that angel girl in connection with that terrible thing, I shall just go straight down and give myself up. And no man worthy of the name could do less."

"Nobody will believe you."

"Except dad, of course." The bitterness of voice was strong. And then the telephone rang. Emma Lily was calling for Barker.

"I thought I'd tell you," she said, "I say, I thought I'd tell you—they're goin' to arrest Glad Lee. I thought I'd tell you, seein's you might better know."

"Are you sure, Emma Lily?" Barker's voice was steady and even.

“ Yes, I’m sure. That Fraser, he’s got a warrant. You comin’ down here? I say, you comin’ down here? ”

“ You bet I’m coming down there! And you tell that fool Fraser not to dare do that thing until he sees me! Get that? ”

But Barker waited for no reply. He hung up the receiver, and without even a word to Stanhope, grabbed his hat and rushed out of the front door.

CHAPTER X

EVIDENCE

BARKER HAZELTON strode into the Woodbine cottage with a look on his face that fairly frightened Emma Lily as she admitted him.

"Now, look here, Mr. Fraser," the young man said, "I'm simply fighting mad, but I don't want to bluster or rant around. I just want you to answer one or two questions which I have every right to ask. First, on what grounds do you propose to arrest Gladys Lee?"

"Well, Mr. Hazelton, she was here late that night; she is an expert, I am told, with firearms; she is a loyal friend and sweetheart—"

"None of that is evidence. Go on." Barker's face was coldly stern.

"Then I'll admit our strongest argument," and Fraser looked at Lewis with an inquiring glance.

"I'll tell him," and Lewis grinned. "You probably don't know, Mr. Hazelton, that the psychoanalysts have come to the conclusion that much mischief is done by young girls."

"Is *that* so?" and Barker stared at him, with a look of half-amused curiosity.

Just then Stanhope arrived, having followed his impetuous young friend with all possible speed.

"Dave," Barker greeted him, "what do you think? Mr. Lewis tells me he's a student of psycho-analysis!"

"And does it affect our case?" asked Stanhope, lightly.

"Yes, sir, it does!" Lewis exclaimed, incensed at the implied slight; "you may not know, unless you are versed in these matters, that many crimes are directly traceable to little girls. Look at that case of ghosts up in Antigonish. All the work of a sly, young girl. Look at the historic cases of the doings in the Wesley house, and the Fox sisters; look at the girl out west who fooled the doctors with her high temperature. Look at the photographs of fairies that bamboozled a well-known author. One and all the work of young girls. Therefore, we have precedent for our belief that Gladys Lee is capable of this crime. Now, wait a minute; she may not be capable of it normally, or at all times. But she is capable of being roused to a frenzy of hatred or revenge. She is capable of such a state of subconscious excitement that she could commit a crime involuntarily, almost instinctively—perhaps even unconsciously."

"Oh, come now, Mr. Lewis," Stanhope said, kindly, as if to a wayward child, "there is a lot in

that psycho-analysis business, and doctors are learning more about it all the time, but it is dangerous in the hands of a beginner. I can see you've read more or less of it, and you're trying to apply it to your work. But, my friend, you'll have to study it a great deal more deeply before you can preach or practise it."

"That's all very well, Mr. Stanhope, but the facts remain. They are as I've stated. And we hold that there is sufficient evidence against the girl to arrest her. She was here much later than the time she herself admitted. She left her fingerprints on the windowpane. She denies entering the house, but of course, she would do that. And she is known to be a high-strung, high-tempered, erratic young thing, of just the temperament to possess a dual nature."

"Everybody possesses a dual nature, Mr. Lewis."

"Yes, I know that. But in some the subconscious mind has far greater force and strength than in others."

"You mean its manifestations are more marked or more frequent."

"That's exactly what I mean. And some inquiries I've made prove that Gladys Lee is such."

"Now hold on there!" broke in Barker, "I won't have that girl talked about like that! She is the most normal, natural—"

"Keep still, Bark," Stanhope said, "we are not aspersing her. I understand what Mr. Lewis means, and his general statements are correct, or partly so. But Mr. Lewis, you must remember that these tricks that have been cut up by naughty little girls are, for the most part, merely mischief, not crime. There is a vast difference between playing spook or making up fairies, and murdering two people."

"That is true," Lewis rejoined, "but the principle is the same. And I hold that the suppression of a desire to get rid of a person, brings about a state of the subconscious mind that makes it possible to do the deed while in a subconscious state."

"You are tampering with deep subjects, Mr. Lewis," Stanhope said, gravely. "I do not deny your statements, but I do doubt your academic knowledge and your thorough experience of these matters. Yet I can see how you think it all applies to Gladys Lee, and while I don't agree with you, I want to consider the thing further."

"Consideration be hanged!" cried Barker, obstinately. "It's all poppycock, that stuff about subconsciousness and all that—"

"Now, Bark, don't express yourself on subjects you know nothing whatever about," Stanhope spoke sharply. "These matters are outside your ken, but they are possible factors in the case."

"They are not," and Hazelton's eyes glittered.

"They have nothing to do with the case. Because, Mr. Lewis, I am the murderer and I am here to give myself up."

Lewis and Fraser looked at him, the one with a slight, amused smile, the other with a stare of blank amazement.

"Not good enough, Mr. Hazelton," Lewis said; "if you had handed out that line of talk at the start, we were ready to swallow it, but when you come along with it, only to save your sweetheart, it won't wash."

"But it's true. I confess the crime—I was beside myself with anger, with rage, and I saw red, I simply lost my head, and I did for Nevin Lawrence."

"And for Mrs. Sayre?"

Barker gulped, and swallowed, then, "yes," he said, with an air of determination, "yes. I scarcely knew what I was doing—"

"And you don't know what you're talking about!" Lewis fairly snorted in disgust. "You can't put it over, I tell you."

"Look here," Fraser said, suddenly, "you said, Mr. Hazelton, find the one who broke the little statue, and you've got the murderer."

"Yes," Barker exclaimed. "I broke the statuette."

"Why?"

"Oh, just in my blind rage. I tell you I ran amuck—I didn't care *what* I did—"

"And you don't care what you *say*!" scoffed Lewis. "Now, look here, Miss Lee's fingerprints are superimposed on your own, on that windowpane. Yet you say you were there after she was."

"But I didn't look in the window that time!" the young man spoke eagerly. "I looked in the window when I was there the first time—early in the evening."

"Oh, I see. Then, according to her own story, Miss Lee just sauntered round there, looked in at the darkened window and went home again."

"Yes," said Barker, his eyes warily watching Lewis' face.

"Wait a minute," Lewis referred to his notebook. "I made a mistake; it was the other way. I see, your fingerprints are over Miss Lee's. My error. Now what?"

"I made a mistake, too," said Barker, steadily: "I remember now I did look in at that window the second time I went there."

"Small use in continuing this farce," and Lewis snapped a rubber band round his notebook with an air of finality.

"No," Stanhope said, "you can't work that confession, Barker. Let's try something else."

"What shall we try, Dave?" Barker spoke with a pathetic earnestness.

"I know what we'll try, old chap, and I know it'll help. Now, Mr. Fraser, won't you meet us half way. Don't arrest that little girl for a day or two. Wait until after the funeral of those people is over, wait until Mr. Hazelton gets back from the White Mountains, wait until you get at least a little more direct evidence, a little surer reason for your extraordinary arrest. You know what trouble it makes for you to arrest the wrong person. Gladys Lee won't run away. You can watch her, if you like. But don't act hastily—and you must admit your decision was a hasty one."

Lewis looked at him in silence for a moment, then said: "you're a wise man, Mr. Stanhope. I'll hand it to you. And I don't want to get in dutch by a false arrest. I'm convinced myself that the little girl is the criminal—why, I read about a—"

"Spare us those stories, please," said Stanhope, a little curtly. "We can all read them for ourselves. And remember, they are mostly about younger girls and lesser crimes. Don't let your imagination distort the facts on which those stories are based. Now, Mr. Fraser, will you let matters rest for about three days? It can do your work no harm, I'm sure. Of course, if important evidence turns up that will make a difference. But unless it does, will you wait over?"

"Yes, I'd rather do so," Fraser said, thoughtfully. "I feel myself Mr. Lewis is a bit too previous."

So the confab broke up, and as it was not very late, Barker went over to see Gladys for a few minutes, and Stanhope went in to Gray Porches to await his return.

The boarding house had come to be a sort of rendezvous for an exchange of gossip or opinions about the Lawrence case, as it was now called.

This state of things did not at all please Ben Gray, who hated to have his house infested, as he put it, with scandal mongers.

But his boarders were always interested, and especially the older ones, who discussed every bit of news and tore to pieces every new theory.

Not that theories were numerous. Most people agreed with Ben Gray that the crime was done by a robber, who being interrupted, perhaps as he was acquiring the valuable statue, killed the householders to save himself.

It was preposterous, and yet it was the least so of all that had been suggested.

"You see," said Mrs. Trent, who was a little autocratic, and who had already won a sort of pre-eminence over the longer established Mrs. Endicott, "you see, any other supposition is absurd. The motive is far too slight for young Hazelton, and as to that slip of a girl—the idea is too ridiculous."

"But," said Mrs. Endicott, in her best Bostonian manner, "you must remember, dear Mrs. Trent, that there are complexes, arising from suppression of impulses that lead to most unbelievable crimes."

The lady from Boston was very chummy with the lady from New York, but sometimes she rather resented the infringement on her own popularity. Mrs. Endicott was accustomed to being queen bee at Gray Porches, and now Mrs. Trent was achieving an almost equally important position among the boarders.

The latter tossed her head, after the manner of those who "do not believe in all that psychological rubbish!" and pursued her own subject.

"Yes," she said, "the awful thugs and yeggs—I believe that's what they call them—that abound in our metropolis, have begun, probably to drift up here, and though it is a horrible prediction, this may not be the last of such marauders."

"Oh, hush, Mrs. Trent, you make my flesh creep!" cried Miss Lowe. "I've always thought this place a veritable paradise where nothing unpleasant ever entered."

"And now the serpent has got in!" exclaimed Miss Hemingway, with the air of saying something of great originality.

"I can't think the murderer a novice," said Mr. Endicott, ponderously, "for he left no clues."

"Most murderers are novices," argued Mrs.

Trent, "I don't believe it often becomes a calling with them."

"No, I fancy one murder would satisfy the average assassin," Stanhope said. "Mrs. Trent, there is in your home town a fine detective named Stone. Ever hear of him?"

"No," was the reply, "I never did. Do you think of employing him?"

"I do think of it," Dave returned. "But I've gone no further than the thought. I shall wait till Mr. Hazelton gets home—"

"But I thought you were more or less of a detective, yourself," Mrs. Endicott said to him.

"I fancied I was," and Stanhope frowned, "but I've got nowhere in this matter. I searched the rooms for clues, and found nothing. I've tried to delve into the past history of the victims, with no results whatever. I've made inquiries and investigations in the village, which brought forth nothing. Either I am an absolute blank as a detective or else, in this case, there is nothing to detect."

"You've found nothing?" asked Ben Gray.

"Nothing at all. Not the weapon, not the shoes that made those footprints, not the identity of the strange man seen by Miss Busby, not the missing pearl stickpin, not a scintilla of evidence or an iota of motive—that is, none of any real worth."

"You *have* drawn blank, haven't you?" observed Gray. "Well, that supports my theory that there's nothing to find."

"I suppose so," Stanhope admitted, "and that's why I'd like to see Fleming Stone take hold of the case, and see what he can do with it."

The next day but one the double funeral was held. The cottage was crowded until it seemed that the whole village and a few neighboring ones had come, whether from respect or curiosity, to attend the services.

No relatives of the victims of the tragedy had been discovered. Advertisements had brought no response, inquiries had divulged no information. Without mourners other than neighbors, the last rites were said over the two caskets.

Ben Gray was in charge, which was sufficient guaranty that all would be circumspect and correct.

Stanhope insisted that Barker should go with him, for the elder man feared criticism if young Hazelton stayed away. Amos, it was hoped could get there, but his train was late, and he reached New Midian after the congregation had assembled.

Going straight home, Amos Hazelton made for a shady corner of a veranda where he could rest and wait for his son.

To his surprise, he found there before him, a slip of a girl, with soft, curly hair, that seemed to

sparkle when the sun touched it, and big blue-gray eyes that looked at him with a troubled gaze.

"Mr. Hazelton," this young stranger said, "I am Gladys Lee. I know you don't like me, I know you don't want to speak to me," her little hands clasped themselves in a gesture of appeal, "but in the name of the love you and I both have for Barker, I want to beg you to listen to me a moment."

Amos Hazelton looked at her. He was quick to detect theatricalism or posing, but he could see none here. Either, he concluded to himself, she was a truly accomplished actress or she was desperately sincere. He would find out.

"Go on," he said.

"I've only time for a few words, but," she lifted her head with that engaging bird-like tilt, "they must be said. First, Barker is in danger—serious danger."

"On account of you," this with a stern, accusing glance.

"Yes," calmly, "on account of me. But not on account of anything I can help. Therefore, I come to you—for Barker's sake."

Amos Hazelton dismissed the idea that she was a self-conscious chit, posing for effect, and realized her deep earnestness.

"Tell me," he said, with more kindness in his voice than he had hitherto shown.

"Well, those addle-pated detectives have come to the conclusion that I killed Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre—"

"You!" Amos could not repress the horrified exclamation.

"Yes, don't bother now about their reasons, they're utterly foolish ones, about psychology and such things. Now, Mr. Hazelton, I didn't kill them."

She shook her head slowly, and spread her pinky palms up toward him as if in utter disavowal.

"No, I know it," he returned with the same unconscious gravity.

"But they won't believe I didn't, and so Barker thought it his duty to go to them and say he did it—to shield me, you see."

"Confessed, did he?"

"Yes; he'll tell you all this when he sees you, but I wanted to get in my oar first. Now they won't believe him, and he vows he'll give them proof that they'll have to believe! Oh, what a dear, foolish thing he is, isn't he Mr. Hazelton?"

Her head went to one side, and her eyes had a faraway look, as an expression of almost maternal love stole over her face.

"We have to take care of him, you and I, while his mother is away," she smiled, but through rising tears.

"Well, I must get busy," she dashed the back of her hand across her eyes. "Now, I've thought it all out, and there's only one thing to do—"

"Find the real murderer."

A lovely light came into her eyes.

"Oh! why, you dear thing! How quick you are on the uptake!" Her smile was dazzling, and Amos Hazelton almost surrendered to her entirely.

But he was really a hard-headed man, and, incidentally, a hard-hearted one, and he reserved decision.

Gladys sensed all this, but went bravely on; "you don't have to like me, that isn't in the bond, but you must protect Barker—from himself—and—from me." The last accompanied by a bit of a roguish smile.

Amos looked at her with a face devoid of expression, and she struggled on.

"The detectives or police or whatever they call them, are getting nowhere," she announced. "They have not gone forward one step—except missteps—since they started. Now, sir, you must get somebody that can find that murderer."

"My friend, Mr. Stanhope is a pretty good sleuth—"

"Only as an amateur," the little hands came together and clasped in appeal. "Please, please, Mr.

Hazelton, get a good one, a big one. Get Fleming Stone!"

The last words were in a scared whisper.

"Stone? What do you know of him?"

"He's the man Mr. Stanhope wants—"

"Stanhope does. Oh, he's too modest. He can ferret out—"

"No, he can't!" She had risen now, and stamped her little foot in emphasis. "I know he can't and he knows it. And Bark knows it. And the man they both want is this Stone person! And they say you won't have him—you'll say he's too expensive and it's unnecessary, and you'll be obstinate and pig-headed—and the beans will all be spilled and the fat in the fire!"

She was sobbing now, but bravely trying and fairly well succeeding in stopping her tears.

"Those aren't my words, you understand—it's just what Barker and Mr. Stanhope said—"

"Ah, just which one said I was pig-headed?"

"Why, why—I guess I slipped that in myself."

And at this Amos Hazelton laughed outright.

"Bark said it," he declared, with conviction. "Well, Miss Lee, you came up here to enlist my sympathy toward the question of having the Stone man take up the matter?"

"Yes," the little face was very grave; "but don't speak like that. You don't know how serious it is.

If—if Barker sets out to convince those men that he killed those people, he'll do it. And I c-can't convince them that I did it, because I didn't."

"But Barker didn't either—"

"I know, but he's cleverer than I am, and he can make them think he did!"

"Sounds like rubbish to me—"

"But it isn't, Mr. Hazelton, you don't know how determined they are to find one of us guilty. You don't know how crazy they are about that psycho business, and you don't know how—er, pig-headed Bark is in the matter of clearing me."

"Um—he takes after his father—"

The appreciative smile this brought forth, just about completed Hazelton's capitulation to this brave little soul.

"Miss Lee—Gladys," he said, and his voice was gentle, "you have succeeded in your mission. I understand far more than you think I do. I see the situation, and—a great deal more beside. You have shown a fine spirit, and a beautiful nature. And I promise you I shall engage the services of this man Stone, if it is possible to do so.

"Also, I want you to know, that I have come to this decision because of what you have told me. If you had not come here, and my son and my friend had come and asked me to get this man—I should have said no—and with my pig-headedness, I prob-

ably should have stuck to it. Now, I shall agree to it, and I shall put it through as soon as I can. You have made me realize the danger you two innocent young people are in, and you have made me see that an amateur detective can never discover the real solution of this dreadful mystery. Run along home, now—you have done your part, and you have done it excellently well.”

With her true instinct of the fitness of things, Gladys left him without another word; as she told Barker afterward, she just stippled off, leaving Amos Hazelton already deep in thought.

And when Barker and Stanhope arrived they found him alert and eager to hear all they had to tell him, and to tell them his own family news.

They had reached the end of the story of the threatened arrest of Gladys and the faked confession of Barker, and they had told of Stanhope's plea that the matter might be held in abeyance for a few days.

“Case of misguided energy, that accusation of the little girl, isn't it?” Amos said; “Mr. Lewis seems to be educated beyond his intelligence. And, Barker, while you're the stuff heroes are made of, you're not *quite* baked yet. Well, if you ask me, I suggest that we call in Fleming Stone.”

His two auditors stared at him.

CHAPTER XI

FLEMING STONE

AND so Fleming Stone came. He arrived at Hazel Hill on an afternoon train and was enchanted with the beauty of the place and the surroundings. By mutual consent the matter in hand was not taken up until after dinner, when the four men gathered on a sheltered corner of the veranda and settled down for a confab.

Stone was a good looking, well set up man of middle age. His calm face, framed in iron-gray hair gave an impression of force and capability. His deep-set dark eyes were quick and searching. And his whole manner was full of magnetism and charm. He compelled confidence by reason of his own quiet self-assurance that had in it no trace of arrogance.

Barker Hazelton at once worshipped him as a hero, and the elder men felt the power of his fine and efficient mentality.

"Rather a different type of detective from that fat-headed Lewis," was Stanhope's unspoken comment.

Stone listened while the others gave him a full account of the case. He was exceedingly interested

as there were so many unusual, even unique circumstances to be considered.

"Extraordinary," he said, "a double murder, of people practically unknown, in a quiet little village! I think we shall find the motive a deep one, the criminal exceedingly clever and the solution extremely difficult."

And his hearers knew at once that the last clause was not spoken in order that his own task might be exalted.

"Of course," he went on, "I wish I might have been here at the first. Clues, if there were any, must be destroyed by this time. But we won't waste regrets on that. As I see it now, I am most interested in those shoes. They seem to me the key to the puzzle. That is, if you are sure the heel prints are too sharp and clear to have been made by any shoes you can find."

"I'm sure of that," said Stanhope. "I made most careful examination on that point."

"Have you found any recent shoe bills, or check stubs to a shoe dealer?"

"Haven't looked, especially," and Stanhope smiled ruefully; "I thought I had a detective bent, but I fear I was mistaken."

"You see," Amos Hazelton put in, "the case for the prosecution is a strange one. There are no relatives of the dead people who are crying for ven-

geance. There is no one to want the crime avenged, closer than friendly neighbors, and, of course, the state. I frankly admit that I should have taken no steps in the matter if they hadn't pounced on my son and an innocent girl as suspects. But those two young people must be vindicated whether the real criminal is found or not."

"The crime is far too grave, much too brutal, to have been done by young people," Stone said, thoughtfully. "Unless it was a burglar, which I doubt, that deed was done after long deliberation and preparation. As I see it, it was not an impulsive crime, but a premeditated one. Tell me more of the general character of the brother and sister."

The others told him such bits of description as seemed illuminative, and Stanhope said:

"I spent some time looking over their books."

"That," Stone observed, "is always indicative. What were they?"

"Of the best. Mostly poetry, essays, and good fiction."

"Not scientific or professional?"

"No. Almost all *belles-lettres*. Mr. Lawrence had in his bedroom, books of light verse, Austin Dobson and Wilfred Blunt and also Browning and Swinburne. Mrs. Sayre's bedside books were Elizabethan lyrics and sonnets from the Portuguese. I

noticed these in detail because I thought they pointed to a fine taste in literature."

"They point to more than that," Stone said, sagaciously. "Mr. Lawrence wrote stories?"

"Yes, and corking good ones," Barker Hazelton declared.

"Has he been writing long?"

"No, took it up about the time he came here to live. He said he wanted to be near New York as his publisher is there."

"You mean editor? He wrote for the *Carnival*?"

"Yes, I do mean editor. He has never had a book published. But I think he meant to collect his stories in book form when he had enough of them."

"He never talked to you of his past life?"

"No," said Barker, reflectively, "except once he referred to it indirectly. I was up in his bedroom—went up to see a picture he cherished—and I noticed that little figure. The one that was found broken. I didn't know its value and casually admired it, when he launched forth in a detailed description of the things. It seems they are famous. Well, incidentally, he said, 'it was one of my choicest possessions.' This sounded queer and I said, 'isn't it now?' and he said, 'Now I only admire it for itself.' Strange, wasn't it?"

"You're sure you've narrated that faithfully?" Stone asked, his eyes shining.

"Sure."

"Then that figurine is our best clue, so far. It is the only link with his life here and his life before he came here."

"You look toward his past, then, for the solution of the mystery?" asked Amos Hazelton.

"I do, so far as I can judge at this early stage. Yet that may not be right. I'm keen to get down and see the house, and look over the rooms. No one could live in a home two years or more and not leave footprints on the sands of time."

"As well as on the flower-bed," smiled Stanhope.

"Those are extraordinary," said Stone, frowning thoughtfully. "You know, footprints on a flower-bed are among the most hackneyed clues of detective fiction. At first glance, one can't help thinking those footprints were put there on purpose."

"That somebody wore Mr. Lawrence's shoes!"

"We don't know that they were Mr. Lawrence's shoes."

"Well, just working out that idea," Stanhope said, "whose shoes could they have been, who could have worn them, and why?"

"Those questions answered," Stone said, smiling, "we have the whole solution of the mystery. At present, I can answer none of them. That's why I said those shoes are the chief key to the puzzle. Find those and you have your man."

"What about Miss Busby's queer man?" Stanhope said.

"The trouble with testimony from chattering women is that they are so prone to exaggerate." Stone looked up apologetically. "Not that I mean anything invidious. But while women are valuable witnesses as to their quick wit and ready intuition, their narratives are apt to be colored and distorted. If I question a woman witness, I gather more from what she doesn't say than from what she does."

"There isn't anything Lizzie Busby doesn't say!" Barker put in, dryly. "She says it all."

"She must be an amusing character," Stone remarked, "also that Emma Lily. Delightful name!"

"But as to the queer man," Stanhope persisted. "She never made up that yarn entirely. She isn't as visionary as all that."

"He may have been the murderer," Stone conceded. "A big head, you say?"

"So she described him. And there's White-Face."

Stanhope recounted in detail all he knew of Taylor.

"Sounds interesting," Stone said, "but as Fraser knows him, there's no real reason to look that way. You say he didn't recognize the dead people?"

"He *said* he didn't," returned Stanhope, and Stone gave him a quick look.

"You distrust his sincerity?"

"Oh, only because he's such a strange acting chap. He turns up at unexpected times, and he has a prowling, furtive air—"

"Has he a big head?"

"No, and he's not a big man. Miss Busby's prowler was big and tall."

"Don't bank on that description. The witching hour and the moonlight may have exaggerated the effect of the man and of his head."

"You'll interview her yourself, of course?" asked Amos.

"Oh, yes. And, here's another thing. Much as I enjoy this luxurious home of yours, much as I'd like to be here with you all, I feel I can do far better work nearer the scene of the crime. So I think I shall have to take up my abode at Gray Porches. It can be managed, I suppose? I'll come up here often to report progress and to have a respite from the other boarders. And, the engaging Emma Lily is there, I understand."

"Yes, she went into service with Mrs. Gray, who was very glad to get her." This from Stanhope. "So you'll have her under your eye and Miss Busby is next door—you're interested in her?"

"Very much," Stone replied. "And in your white-faced man, though he may be in no way connected with it all. But I am not interested—that is, as a detective—in this young man," he smiled at

Barker, "or in the little girl you tell me about. Any one suspecting them of that deed is crazy himself! And I suspect that Lewis *is* a little unbalanced. The most dangerous thing for a detective to do is to try to use psycho-analytic methods, when his knowledge of that very abstruse science is merely smattering. But he is a menace, and I shall take pleasure in spiking his guns, and then addressing myself to the greater task of finding the murderer of those people. It is, so far, the strangest case I have ever met with, and though I can't help forming a theory, it is only theory as yet, and I shall quickly abandon it unless it is borne out by incontrovertible evidence."

"I say, Mr. Stone," Barker's boyish face was eager, "won't you write down your theory, and seal it up, and then—"

"Then," Stone laughed, "then if it is right I can triumph, and if it isn't, you can have the laugh on me! Well, I'm willing, on condition that my note is held inviolate until I have finished with the case, and also that I am accorded the privilege of recanting at any time. For I've stated it is mere theory, which the first glance into Woodbine cottage may prove utterly untenable."

"It's based on what you've heard here to-night?" asked Stanhope.

"Entirely. That is, on what I've heard and what that has led me to surmise. Now I'm quite willing

to put it on record, and Mr. Hazelton will keep it for us."

They went into the house, and Stone gravely wrote a few lines on the paper Barker provided, as gravely sealed it in an envelope, with sealing wax, and handed it over to Amos Hazelton, who put it at once in his safe.

"Don't tell anybody about it," said Stone, "for your local detectives might burgle the safe and steal my thunder."

They promised this, and then after some more desultory chat about the matter they all went to bed.

Next day found Fleming Stone most comfortably quartered at Gray Porches. The house was full, as always, but Mrs. Gray let him have her room for a few days, after which he was to have Mrs. Trent's room, as that lady was leaving at the end of the week.

The detective himself would have said that his quarters were comfortable, when he could get into them. But he was an object of such interest to the other boarders that he was waylaid by them whenever he appeared.

They stopped him in the halls or on the porches, they even swarmed to his table at meal times. They were everlastingly questioning, commenting, even advising him.

But Stone was a good-natured man, and a good

mixer, and, too, he was not without hope that he glean some information from this flood of chatter.

Especially he talked to the matrons, avoiding the young girls and old maids whenever possible.

Naturally, Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Trent monopolized him, and he seemed willing enough to be lionized by them.

But when he went over to look at the Woodbine cottage, he had to be almost stern in his orders that nobody should accompany him.

He had procured the keys from Fraser, who met his request for them with an ill grace. Fraser resented the intrusion of this celebrated detective, and he didn't care who knew it.

Lewis, on the other hand, though chagrined at being set aside, was so eager to see Stone at work, that he welcomed the expert. Moreover, Lewis had come to the conclusion that his suspicion of Gladys Lee was rather absurd, and he wanted now, of all things, to work with Stone.

So, Stone had no sooner entered the cottage than Lewis appeared. He introduced himself and stated frankly his desire to help, or at least, to look on.

"I'm not going to do any miracles," Stone laughed; "I'm only going to look the house over, which of course, you have already done."

"Yes, sir," said Lewis, looking at him as a little dog might look at a big one. And then he trotted

behind the great detective in his rapid trip through the house.

Stone methodically began at the top, and going first to the attic glanced appraisingly about.

It was a pleasant enough place, tidy and orderly, with some odd bits of furniture and a few trunks neatly stored.

Stone's quick, roving glance took it all in, and once or twice he nodded, and again he frowned.

"See anything of importance, sir?" Lewis asked, eagerly.

"I see only what you see," Stone smiled at him. "Let's look in the trunks."

They opened them, together. Some were empty, some held winter clothing and one was full of books. Glancing at these, Stone saw they were mostly architectural works, of more or less value.

"Just a general storehouse," he said, as he gave a last glance around and started down stairs.

On the second floor, he went first to Nevin Lawrence's room. It had been put in order, and the bed made properly, but Stone's attention was on the furnishings and decorations. He nodded with satisfaction at the window curtains and he smiled as he looked at the armchairs covered with flowered chintz.

Lewis fairly squirmed with curiosity as he watched the detective's face, but he knew it was of no use to ask questions.

In Lawrence's bathroom, Stone lingered a few moments as he gazed about. It was in beautiful order, and of plain but immaculate appointments.

He sighed and went across the hall to Mrs. Sayre's room.

His face was sorrowful as he looked about the pretty place. Everything betokened the cherished abode of a cultured and beauty-loving woman.

The soft carpet harmonized with the coloring of the hangings; the easy chairs were done in matching chintz, and the lace scarves and *lingerie* pillows here and there, made the room a boudoir as well as a bedroom.

"A dainty little person arranged this room," Stone said, pleasantly, as he scrutinized the table, with its books, *bonbonnière*, cigarette tray and flower vase.

Then he studied the toilet table, with its exquisite appointments, and went on to the bathroom, which was as well done as the other but with additional feminine luxuries.

"Were these people rich?" he asked, suddenly, and Lewis replied, "not quite that, but they were comfortably off. They rented this house, you see, but all the fancy flumadiddles Mrs. Sayre put in herself."

Stone returned to the bedroom and asked to be shown the exact spot where the body had lain.

This he regarded silently for some time, and then said:

"What was it about her outstretched arms?"

"That's Emma Lily's yarn," Lewis returned. "I don't put too much faith in it. She says, when she found Mrs. Sayre, she was stretching out her hands for the pearl pin the burglar stole."

"Vivid imagination on the part of Emma Lily," Stone commented. "You don't think she appropriated that pin, do you?"

"No, *I* don't—but some folks do."

"Oh, well, I'll find that out. Let's go downstairs."

The living room and library were next the objective points, and then Stone went on to the dining-room and kitchen. But these didn't keep him long, and after a brief glance out of the back door, he announced his investigation finished.

"Find anything?" asked Lewis, hoping a casual inquiry would elicit more than an evident desire for information.

"Lots," said Stone, succinctly; "but I saw only what you've already seen. I've no magic glasses. Now for the interesting Miss Busby."

"Mind if I go along?"

"Well, yes, I do mind. I'd rather you wouldn't, and I'll tell you why. It's because Miss Busby may say something to me alone, that she wouldn't say if

you were there. This is improbable, I admit, but, as a detective, you must see that it's possible."

Thus appealed to, as a fellow of the craft, Lewis had to agree, and Stone whisked over to the Busybody's house alone.

She was none too willing to talk, he soon discovered, and he wondered why. She had been represented to him as a chatterbox, but, on the contrary, she was almost mute.

Partly from her curt replies and partly by his own intuition, Stone at last divined she had a secret to conceal and she was afraid this all-wise detective would get it out of her.

So, determining to get it out of somebody else, he said, in a business-like way:

"There's only one thing I want from you, Miss Busby, and that's a careful description of the queer man you saw that night."

As he had surmised, she thawed at this, and seemed willing to tell the tale. It was substantially as he had heard it from others, but he realized that it had gained a little as it passed through several mouths.

The tall man had grown taller, the big head had grown bigger, as the story was passed from one to another, but Stone had discounted this. It always happened.

"Still, you thought him queer?" he finished.

"Why, yes—that is, he acted queer—afraid—uncertain—that's the best I can describe it."

"And a good description, too. Now, you saw him pull his hat down over that big head?"

"Oh, his head wasn't so awful big. It might 'a been his hat was too small."

"Probably not his own hat—part of his disguise—"

"Well, anyway, he pulled it down on his head this way—" and with both hands Miss Busby pulled an imaginary hat down hard over her ears.

"I wouldn't make such a point of that, sir, only that's all I saw him do. The moon went under a cloud then, and the sudden dark seemed as black as Egypt. And when it lightened up a little, he was gone."

"Now, Miss Busby, you're sure of all this?"

"Positive. He stood just where they found those footprints the next morning."

"I see. I suppose you can give no further description than rather tall, pretty big, long coat, slouch hat, pulled down, and a furtive, fearful air?"

"That's just him! And I can't tell you another word about him. I wish I could."

"I wish so too, Miss Busby, for that was the murderer of those two people. Those shoes made footprints up the steps and into the house and were lost on the soft carpets. Yes, I know your local

detectives found out all that—it remains for me only to discover the identity of the criminal.”

Having achieved his purpose, Stone took his leave and went back to Gray Porches. Here, he invited Emma Lily to a shaded back porch, and began his interview with her.

“Now, Emma Lily,” he said, rather sternly, “I want to know the truth about your finding those bodies. Particularly about Mrs. Sayre. And I mean the whole truth. You know—about those outstretched arms. Did you see that pearl stickpin?”

Emma Lily grew panicky.

“No,” she cried, “I didn’t! I say *I* didn’t! Nobody can prove I did—”

“Nobody can prove anything about that scene but yourself, Emma Lily. That’s why you *must* tell the truth. What was the poor lady reaching out for?”

And then Fleming Stone had what he afterward said was the greatest surprise of his life.

Looking cowed, but truthful, Emma Lily replied:

“Her wedding ring, sir.”

“*What?*”

“Just that, I say, just that. I’ll tell now—I’d rather. If I’m going to be suspected of stealing pearls, I’d prefer to tell the truth. And I didn’t mean no harm keepin’ it back, I say, I didn’t *mean* no harm.”

“And probably you did no harm,” said Stone, kindly. “Tell me all about it.”

“Well, I—when I saw that poor lady all stretched out there—dead—I was just about distracted—I say, just about distracted.”

“You must have been,” Stone murmured, sympathetically.

“Yes, I was. And, bein’ distracted, my first thought was to lay her straight-wise. Then I remembered it wasn’t right to touch her—and I was lookin’ at her, when I noticed how she was a reachin’ out like for somethin’. And I looked, and I saw her wedding ring, the only ring she ever wore, lyin’ just beyond her fingers, like as if she had died tryin’ to reach it. And I—I was distracted, you remember—I picked it up and I slipped it back on her finger. That’s what I did.”

“You did just right,” said Fleming Stone.

CHAPTER XII

A LEAP IN THE DARK

THE undertaker of the village of New Midian, Elisha Crouch, was a small, wizened man, well past middle age. He was soft of voice and manner as became his calling, and he had that air of deference which is also inseparable from the profession.

His rooms were well appointed and the two show caskets were of fine quality.

He greeted Fleming Stone and Dave Stanhope, when they came in, with a puzzled but hopeful air. Perhaps there was new business in sight.

But Stone said, pleasantly, "Mr. Crouch?" "Yes!" "I am Stone the detective, and I'm working on the Lawrence case. Now, just one question I want you to answer—maybe two—and then I won't detain you further."

"Certainly, Mr. Stone, certainly. Glad to do anything I can to help you. What is it, sir, what is it?"

"Only this. When preparing the body of Mrs. Sayre for burial, did you notice her rings?"

"Only one, sir—only one, Mr. Stone. A plain gold wedding ring."

"How do you know it was a wedding ring?"

"Why—why—" the man looked a little embarrassed, then quickly recovered his poise, "why, sir, it was a plain gold band, and it was on the third finger of the lady's left hand. Isn't that enough, sir? Isn't that sufficient?"

"Not quite, Mr. Crouch," Stone was watching him narrowly, and saw his fingers move nervously, and his lips go dry. "You know it was a wedding ring, because you removed it and looked inside. Admit it, Mr. Crouch, it was no crime."

"I should say not!" the undertaker seemed relieved to make a clean breast of it all; "an undertaker is supposed to notice all such things. I did take the ring off the finger and I put it back again."

"Yes," Stone said, suavely, "and what was inside?"

"Oh, just the usual thing, two sets of initials, and from and to."

"Yes, of course, but what were the initials?"

"Well, sir, I don't remember exactly. I suppose—"

"Come now, none of that!" Stone looked severe. "You had a right to look into the ring, and now it is your duty to tell what you saw there."

Crouch turned obstinate. "I tell you I don't remember the letters," he said; "if you must know, exhume the body and find out."

"It will be wiser, Mr. Crouch, to tell us," Stone

said, quietly. "I ask it in the name of the law, in the name of justice; and if you persist in refusing to tell, you may find yourself in an unpleasant position."

"Tell it out, Crouch," Stanhope advised. He had known the undertaker for years, and he knew him for an obstinate man, but amenable to reason.

"You don't want to be arrested for contempt—"

"Oh, I'll tell," was the hasty rejoinder. "Why, I was surprised, because they didn't seem to be Mrs. Sayre's initials. But it was none of my business, so I never said anything about it to anybody."

"What were the initials?" Stone urged, impatiently.

"It said, 'E. R. from J. T.' " said the undertaker, slowly. "Now Mrs. Sayre was J. S."

"It would be her maiden name, you see," Stone pointed out. "And though E doesn't stand for Janet, yet you never can tell about a woman's name. Sometimes they use a middle name and discard a first name entirely."

"But," put in Stanhope, "what about the other name? J. T. can't stand for a husband named Sayre."

"No," said Stone, absently. "It certainly can't. But as I say, inscriptions in wedding rings are often unintelligible to any one but the contracting parties. I saw a wedding ring once, engraved, 'To Birdie from Love Pie.' Now, if that had been merely L. P. it would have been misleading! I mean to say

J. T. may well stand for a nickname of Mrs. Sayre's husband, known only to themselves. But the matter is extremely interesting, and I advise you, Mr. Crouch, to preserve the admirable silence you have kept on the subject. You did wisely in keeping the matter to yourself."

"Yes, sir," and the pleased Crouch smiled. "I says to myself, it could do no good for the police to know it, for they might think there was something crooked about the lady, and a more lovely woman than Mrs. Sayre it has never been my luck to meet."

"And Mr. Lawrence? He wore a ring, I am told."

"He did, sir. Set with a stone they call a cats-eye. But he had grown stouter, it seems, since he began to wear it, and I couldn't get it off. No, sir, not with vaseline, or any way. I didn't see any reason for filing it off, so I left it stay on. Was I right sir? You know there are no heirs that we know of."

"Well, it wasn't your business to take any initiative," Stone assured him. "If they gave you the bodies to attend to, it was up to you to leave the rings as you found them."

"Yes, sir—that's what I thought, sir."

"It's all a very strange case," Stone said, musingly. "You found no distinguishing marks of any sort on the bodies?"

"None, of any consequence. A small mole on

the lady's shoulder and a little scar on Mr. Lawrence's ankle—that's about all."

"They might be useful to some one who knew them well," Stone responded, absently, "but no one seems to be trying to establish their identities. That's what makes the case so very peculiar. It would seem as if somebody must come forward. The case is in all the papers, all over the country."

"Yes, sir," said Crouch, deeply interested in his visitor, yet disappointed that this great detective could not say, hot off the bat, who these people were and where they came from.

"Perhaps Mr. Lawrence was buried in those shoes we are searching for," said Stone, suddenly. "Do you know, Mr. Crouch?"

"I know he wasn't," said the undertaker, decidedly. "Mr. and Mrs. Gray, they picked out the clothes for the funeral, and the shoes I put on Mr. Lawrence didn't have rubber heels at all."

"Nor had rubber heels been removed from them?"

"No, sir, they never had any. They were fine black dress shoes, Mr. Stone."

His errand done, Stone went away, and walked along the village sidewalk without a word to Stanhope for several minutes.

Then he said, "I don't mind telling you, Stanhope, that this is the very strangest case I ever came

across. It is so strange, so incredible even, that I think its very strangeness will help toward its solution."

"You're going to solve it, then?"

"Sure, if it's within the bounds of possibility. And I think it is.

"That wedding ring matter is most important. I let that man think it wasn't. But it is. Hello, here comes friend Lewis."

Lewis was still impressed by the presence of the celebrated detective, but he was not quite so much in awe of him as at first, and he said jocularly, "well, Mr. Sleuth, found any clues?"

"The shoes—the *shoes*—" and Stone leaned forward with an exaggerated air of cryptic mystery.

His deep-set dark eyes glared into Lewis' face and made that worthy jump back quickly.

Stone smiled. "Get it out of your head," he said, that I am a wizard, or a dabbler in the black arts. I'm merely a reasoning detective, looking for evidence."

"And you think those missing shoes are the clue?"

"The clue, the whole clue and nothing but the clue," Stone said, oracularly.

The three were standing now, at the corner of the main road and the street that led to Woodbine cottage. Stone was thinking deeply, and paying

little attention to the presence of the other two. His eyes were dark and somber, his facial muscles drawn and tense in the sudden rush of inevitable conclusions that had come to him.

Was he right? he asked himself; *could* he be right? Yet, how could he be wrong?

Lewis saw the evidence of these portentous thoughts on his face, and said to him, banteringly, "look here, Mr. Stone, I've read of transcendant detectives who can deduce the personality of a criminal from a hat or a shoe, but I believe you could reconstruct our murderer from a pair of *missing* shoes."

"I can," said Stone, gazing at him calmly.

Lewis gasped; "and was it the man Miss Busby saw looking in at the window?"

"It was."

"You know him?"

"I didn't say that; I said I could reconstruct the personality. The personality is five feet, seven inches tall; weighs one hundred and sixty pounds, and is active and energetic. Of a passionate and vindictive temperament, yet shrewd, cool and calculating. Of wonderful efficiency, and of an uncanny shrewdness. Of indomitable will and courage, absolutely and entirely cold-blooded, and diabolically clever."

"Well, sir," said Lewis, who had listened attentively, "that sounds impressive, rattled off like

that, but, after all, it's pretty much the description Miss Busby gave of the queer man she saw, with the added assumption of those mental qualities."

"Oh, yes," Stone said, "but you see, Miss Busby mistook the personality in one important respect—it was not a man but a woman."

"What!" Lewis' jaw fell, and Dave Stanhope, too, presented an appearance of utter bewilderment.

"You heard me," and now Stone dropped his half whimsical air and turned grave and stern. "I tell you, this, Mr. Lewis, because I want your help in finding that woman. But I want you to tell no one else, for a short time, at least. Not even Fraser, at present. If we divulge it, we may frighten our quarry away."

Flattered at this mark of confidence from Stone, Lewis readily promised both secrecy and obedience to orders.

"I'd like you," Stone said, slowly, as if thinking aloud, "to go down to New York and interview the editor of that paper—the *Carnival*—and, incidentally, ask him if Mr. Lawrence wrote for any other papers. Get from him all he knows about Nevin Lawrence—every little thing. He may tell more in a personal interview than he did over the telephone. Then, get from him copies of all his magazines that contain stories by Lawrence. Bring them home and read them yourself, and note any

that have in them a reference to those little Tanager figures."

"There's such a reference in the current one," Stanhope said, eagerly. "I read it a few days ago."

"Must be some such reference in an earlier story," Stone mused. "Anyway, Lewis, find out, and let me know as soon as possible."

"All right, Mr. Stone, I'll get off at once," and full of importance, Lewis went away.

"Queer man," said Stone, looking after him, "at first he resented my interference in the case, now he's ready to eat out of my hand."

"He realizes your powers," said Stanhope, sincerely. "But what do you mean by saying the murderer is a woman?"

"Partly evidence, and partly—a leap in the dark. For one thing Mrs. Sayre wouldn't be apt to put up such a desperate fight with a man. He'd overpower her at once. She was not a large or strong woman, as you know, she was backed against the door, fighting, and fell to the floor, still in vigorous resistance, apparently. Oh, if I could have seen that room at first, while she still lay there, what a lot it would have told!"

"I saw it," Stanhope looked chagrined to think how little of evidence he had seen. "She did die fighting, of that I am sure. And, good heavens,

Stone, I did find something—something I totally forgot, till this minute!”

Fleming Stone gave him a short look, much like that a bridge player gives to a partner who revokes, and awaited further disclosures.

“I believe I have it with me,” and Stanhope pulled out a fair-sized pocketbook.

“Do you mean to say,” Stone couldn’t refrain, “that you picked up something in that room and forgot it?”

“Just that,” Stanhope looked uneasy, “but I don’t believe it amounts to anything. You see, I thought I saw a cobweb on the carpet, and I brushed it up in my hand almost automatically, and I found it was a piece of lace or something, and I stuck it in an old letter—here it is.”

Stanhope produced the flimsiest bit of cobwebby mesh and offered it.

Taking it carefully between his thumb and forefinger, Stone spread out the elusive thing, and said:

“Why this is a hair net—the sort women wear to keep their crimps in order.”

“Then it was a woman-to-woman fight, and the intruder snatched this off of Mrs. Sayre’s head!” Stanhope cried, excitedly. “See, it’s torn!”

Stone studied the fine-meshed net.

“They are very frail,” he said, “and it may have already been torn or it may have been torn in

a struggle. But it certainly corroborates my idea of a woman—”

“ Yet, if a man, the net might have fallen from Mrs. Sayre’s head just the same,” Stanhope objected.

“ Let’s go to see Emma Lily,” Stone decreed and they went.

Demanding a private interview, Stone asked Emma Lily to go over to Woodbine with him, and all three went over.

“ Now, Emma Lily,” and Stone intimidated her with one of his most severe glances, “ tell the exact truth, for if you don’t you’ll find yourself in serious difficulties. Did Mrs. Sayre wear a hair net, ever? ”

“ Yes, sir—not always—but only after she’d just had her hair washed.”

“ Who washed it, usually? ”

“ I did, sir. Beautiful hair, it was,” Emma Lily burst into sobs at the thought.

“ Control yourself now,” Stone said, inexorably, “ and have your cry afterward.”

“ Yes sir,” and the woman obediently wiped her eyes and contented herself with an occasional sniffle.

“ Had you washed Mrs. Sayre’s hair shortly before her death? ”

“ No, sir—more like a week or ten days before—yes, say a week or ten days.”

“ Would she then need a hair net to keep it in order? ”

Emma Lily looked wonderingly at him. "Why, no," she said, "no, she wouldn't."

"Then how did it happen that she was wearing a hair net when she died?"

"Land sakes, sir, she wasn't—I say, she *wasn't*."

"How do you know?"

"Why, she was in her nightdress—she had gone to bed. She wouldn't wear one to bed!"

"Are you sure?"

"Of course, I'm sure! Nobody would wear a hair net to bed—"

"Not to keep in crimping pins, or something like that?"

Emma Lily gave him a contemptuous glance.

"Much good a hair net'd be for that! She'd take a piece of lace or net. But Mrs. Sayre didn't use crimping pins—she had a permanent."

"Yes, I know what you mean," said Stone, quickly. He was a little chagrined at his ignorance regarding hair nets, which were really outside his experience, but a permanent he had heard of. "Now, look at this," he produced the net, "can you tell if this belonged to Mrs. Sayre?"

Emma Lily took the net in her hands, and at once said, "that hers? not by any manner of means!"

"How can you be so sure?"

Emma Lily shook her head, as if such crass ignorance were unbelievable.

"You poor fish," she said, carried beyond bounds of decorum by her scorn, "that's a gray net—Mrs. Sayre's hair was very dark brown—"

"Oh," cried Stone, willing to learn, "they have them to match the hair, do they?"

"Of course," Emma Lily said, "you don't suppose I'd wear a red one, do you?"

But Stone was oblivious to her sarcasm, his thoughts were racing wildly. This, then, was the hair net of the murdering woman, the criminal he was in search of!

"Emma Lily," he said—he must work quickly now, before she was on her guard—"who was in love with Mr. Lawrence? Out with it, now," as she hesitated, "in the name of the law, tell me all you know!"

"Oh, I can't—I can't—don't ask me—I say, don't ask me—"

She threw her apron over her face, and burying her head in her arms rocked back and forth on her chair.

Stone recognized a crisis.

"You must!" he said, sternly, and grasped her arms, pulling her hands down from her face. "It wasn't you, Emma Lily, I know that—who was it? Mrs. Gray?"

"Land, no!" she broke into hysterical laughter. "Sarah Gray! why she thinks the sun rises and sets

in that man of hers! Oh, I don't know—I say, I don't know—”

“Then I'll tell you,” and Stone drew closer and whispered, “Miss Busby?”

Emma Lily's round black eyes snapped.

“How'd you know?” she gasped, for her simple nature couldn't temporize. Surprise at Stone's knowledge brought about her admission.

“Well, her hair isn't gray,” he said, as if to himself.

But Emma Lily, now started, broke in.

“No, it ain't but it's that pale ash blonde, that won't take anything but a gray net. The gray's the best for hair like that.”

Clearly this woman was a connoisseur in the matter of nets.

It was like a spur to Stone's already racing suspicions.

“Tell me all about it,” he commanded. “Don't fear you will do wrong—but know that you will do very wrong if you keep back a single word.”

Thus adjured, the now thoroughly frightened woman began.

“Oh, sir, I don't know what to say or where to begin—but Lizzie Busby was just gone on Mr. Lawrence. She thinks I don't know it—but land! how could I help knowin' it, and she a runnin' over here every chance she could make—pretendin' she came

to see me—oh—but she couldn't have done the—the—”

“Don't stop to say what she could or couldn't do—” Stone thundered at her, “go on! How do you know she cared for him? Give definite statements now!”

It was not Stone's way to bully a woman, but he saw that in this instance it was his only chance for success.

“I'll tell you one thing,” Stanhope interrupted, “that first day, at the inquest, when Fraser asked Miss Busby about her visit over here that evening, she blushed and stammered—”

“Oh, did you see that, sir?” cried Emma Lily. “I saw it too. And—well, I'll tell all I know.” With a sudden air of determination, she straightened up and talked quickly, almost feverishly. Stone watched her closely, to make sure she was not carried away by her imagination, but as she went on, he felt positive she was truthfully intentioned.

“That night, Busybody came over here and sat on the back porch with me, a while. Then, Mrs. Sayre went off to the library, and quicker'n scat, Busybody jumps up and says she must run in to speak to Mr. Lawrence about some book or other. So in she goes, and—now, I ain't no Paul Pry, but I suspicioned she was goin' to put it up to Mr. Lawrence—I dunno what made me think it—somethin' in her

way o' talkin,' I guess, so—well—I passed by the livin' room door—I say, I passed by the door—and—” Emma Lily's face turned white, and her voice fell to a whisper, “ if that fool woman wasn't makin' love to Mr. Lawrence! Think of that! Him a fine, big author gentleman, and her a little old maid music teacher! You could'a knocked me down with a feather—I say you could'a—”

“ You're sure of this? ” asked Stone, gravely.
“ What was she saying? ”

“ I can't tell you the words, but she was a clingin' to his coat sleeve, and sayin' how she loved him, and askin' him to have pity on her—oh, my land! think of it I say, think of it! Her—her, with her silly old maid ways—oh my land! ”

“ And Mr. Lawrence? ” asked Stone, “ what did he say? ”

“ He didn't seem to have a chance to say anythin'—she done the talkin'. But he looked like he didn't know what hit him—poor man—and just then, Bark Hazelton come in, and Busybody scooted for home.”

Stone concluded the interview briefly. He warned Emma Lily against repeating a single word of it, under pain of immediate arrest, his favorite threat, and he and Stanhope went back to Hazel Hill.

Barker Hazelton, interviewed, hesitated to express an opinion on Miss Busby's behaviour. But

convinced of the necessity, he told of finding her there when he arrived.

"That is," he explained, "when I came up on the veranda, I saw her inside, on her knees to Lawrence, begging him to love her. I hate to tell this about any woman, but as you demand it, Mr. Stone, there's the story. Mr. Lawrence was evidently greatly disturbed at the scene, and was, I'm quite sure glad that my appearance put an end to it. I think he felt a certain pity for the woman, and didn't want to be too harsh with her. But the look of utter scorn and disgust on his face was unmistakable. She saw it, and she was infuriated—I could see that, though, as I say, as soon as she caught sight of me, she ran off. Why, you don't think poor old Busybody killed him, do you?"

"Hard to say, yet, Barker," Stone answered, "but there is evidence that needs clearing up. And, you know, 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,' as the poet puts it. Now this deed, to me, seems the work of the furthest fury. It looks not only like revenge, but furious revenge."

"And does it tally with the theory you wrote out and put in dad's safe?" asked Barker.

"There's the rub," Stone said, ruefully, "it does in part, but not as a whole."

CHAPTER XIII

THE NET

"THE FURTHEST FURY" Amos Hazelton repeated; "that's an expressive phrase, Mr. Stone. And you think this crime the work of a woman—a woman scorned?"

"I'm only saying there is evidence that seems to point that way," Stone returned, smiling. "I'm not ready to commit myself to a statement, Mr. Hazelton."

"And I don't mean to be intrusive. But if you don't mind, what is some of that evidence? You see, Miss Busby saw a man—"

"That's just it. Was that a man? Now, I've examined those footprints very carefully, and here's one point as a starter. Wherever there are two deep, clear impressions side by side, as if made by some one standing, looking about, the prints are close together. As you know, a man always stands with his feet fairly wide apart. A woman, dressed as a man keeps her feet closer together. Have you never seen a woman in man's clothes? You will always see her sitting or standing, with her knees and her feet together. A man always spreads his legs apart. Again, there is the matter of the big head. Might not that

mean a woman's hair, tucked up under a man's hat, which she pulls down hard, to make it stay on? "

"Clever!" cried Stanhope, "clever, if true. Can you prove it? "

"I'm not proving now," Stone smiled. "I'm merely theorizing, and I usually do that alone; but this time, since it interests you, we'll talk it over together. Then, there was the furtive air, not fear so much as embarrassment. Doesn't it all seem to tally? "

"And then the fight—" put in Barker.

"Yes," agreed Stone, "the fight that Mrs. Sayre quite evidently put up seems to connote a woman antagonist rather than a man. And, finally, the gray hair net, which it is quite plausible to assume Mrs. Sayre dragged from the head of her assailant. But I admit this is only theory. Can we substantiate it? "

"No," declared Barker, "for this reason. You're imagining this woman, this scorned woman to be Lizzie Busby. Now, it was she who saw the queer man. She couldn't see herself! "

"That's the point of it," Stone said, musingly. "You see, assuming for a moment that it was Miss Busby, who, dressed as a man, went over there and stood beneath the window, and then went inside and committed the crime, would it not be a clever thing for her to describe having seen some one else at the window? "

"A little far-fetched," Amos Hazelton said, thoughtfully.

"Not from a psychological viewpoint," Stone returned.

"To assume this thing at all, we've got to admit Miss Busby a little unbalanced, a little 'touched' as they call it, from her suppressed and unrequited love. There can be no doubt of her desperate passion for Lawrence; it is attested by both Barker and Emma Lily. It evidently reached a climax that night just as Barker arrived, and she felt the lash of Lawrence's scorn. This may have been the ignition of the flame of fury and revenge that flared up and seared her very soul—she thought only of revenge, furious revenge."

"It may well have been," Amos said, gravely. "I've known poor old Busybody many years, and if ever there was a disappointed old maid, she's one. I've known she admired Lawrence; indeed, it was common knowledge in the village. But nobody thought much about it; Busybody is a sort of public character, and nobody minds what she does. They're usually busy enough setting straight the exaggerated gossip she has been circulating about them."

"A real village pest, then?" Stone asked.

"Oh, they don't put it that way. Everybody is tolerantly amused rather than annoyed at her vagaries. She never says anything really vicious,

it's more absurd exaggerations of little petty home matters. She's a strange person."

"Clever? I mean ingenious?"

"Extremely so. My wife thinks she's a witch!"

"It all holds together," Stone said, ruminatively.

"And yet—look here, people, I'm doing something that I almost never do! I'm thinking aloud, right before you all! It's confidential, you know—"

"Of course," they chorused.

"And this may be an entirely wrong theory after all. But I have to follow it up and see. Much depends on that hair net—a most valuable clue. If it fell off, or Mrs. Sayre pulled it off the assassin's head, of course that proves a woman."

"She must have pulled it off!" Barker cried, "How else could it have been there? Anyway, that gray net lets Gladys out!"

"Let's you out too," Stone laughed shortly.

"Well, I must say, I usually know sooner and more surely which way to look, but this case is the most baffling I ever struck. At present, I'm pretty sure that man—that queer man, was a woman in man's clothing—either Miss Busby herself or somebody else."

"Unless it was entirely a figment of her own brain," Amos interpolated. "She has a vivid imagination."

"I don't believe she made up that yarn entirely,"

Stone said, "it rings too true in its description. But it is quite on the cards that she described exactly the way she looked and felt, herself. The timid air, the pulled down hat, all would be part of her own attitude, and, as I say, no man stands with his feet close together. That may seem a small point to you, but I hold it important. However, I may be all wrong, and it may have been a man after all. I've no real evidence either way."

Stone looked anxious. As a matter of fact he always hated a case where he must suspect a woman, and he kept away from such a theory as long as possible. But, too, he was a strong believer in the passionate desire for revenge that lies deep in the feminine nature, and he well knew the terrible fury of a woman whose love was spurned.

Feeling the need of direct confirmation or denial of his extraordinary theory, Stone went straight to Miss Busby's house the next morning, and asked for an interview.

The Busybody received him with cordiality, and invited him to sit on the porch.

"Inside, if you don't mind," and Stone stepped into the tidy little parlor.

He carefully noted Miss Busby's head. She had pale, ash-blond hair, which, though it was really turning gray, showed it little, after the manner of that type of hair.

But Stone's quick eyes, scrutinizing sharply, discerned a gray hair net, exactly like the one Stanhope had found.

It was practically invisible, but, looking for it, he could just make out its indistinct meshes.

"Miss Busby," the detective said, in his most ingratiating manner, "I'm on a new tack in my investigations and I wonder if you can help me."

"Glad to, if I can, sir," and the Busybody bridled and smiled, almost disarming Stone's suspicions.

He went on warily, watching her every change of expression.

"That man you saw—that queer man, you know—could it not have been a woman in man's clothes?"

Lizzie Busby looked at him a moment, and then laughed shrilly and said:

"A woman! Not much! You must be crazy! Why, I *know* it was a man—I'm sure of it—"

"But that big head—it might have been a woman's hair—"

"Hair nothing! I suppose a man can have a big head—most of them have, anyway—" she laughed at her own joke.

"But the footprints were close together—men always spread their feet apart—"

"I don't care if he spread his feet, or if he stood on one leg, like any other goose, it was a man—and I know it!"

"Would Mrs. Sayre have fought a man—"

"She would have fought the devil himself! Janet Sayre was no coward. If anybody attacked her, she would fight like a trooper. I wasn't one bit surprised to learn that she fought to the last—" Miss Busby's voice was quieter now, and she had tears in her eyes.

This jarred Stone's theory a little.

"And then, Miss Busby," Stone prepared to play his trump card, "granting that Mrs. Sayre fought so bravely, resisting the terrible attack, does it not indicate a woman, that this net was found under Mrs. Sayre's body?"

With a sudden quick gesture, he pulled the gray hair net from his pocket and waved it before her eyes.

He expected a scream or a horrified shrinking back, but to his disappointment, Miss Busby looked at the net without interest.

"Well, my good gracious!" she remarked, dispassionately, "if you detectives don't beat all! I s'pose that's what you call a clue! Why, that net might'a been there for weeks. Those things, they blow around a room, if say, a window's open, and they stick to the carpet, so, you might sweep a dozen times and leave 'em lay there and never know it."

Even Stone's acute ears could detect no faltering tone or uncertain inflection. To all appearances the woman's careless indifference to the significance of his clue was perfectly sincere. If it were her net,

she was either unconscious of its loss, or the most consummate actress he had ever seen.

"But would Mrs. Sayre have a gray net in her possession?"

"Oh, you mean, 'cause her own hair wasn't gray? Why, it might'a been dropped there by some caller, I might'a dropped it myself—the things fly off awful easy. Or it might'a been off the head of some cleaning woman—"

"Oh, come now, Miss Busby, cleaning women don't dress up in hair nets—"

"Oh, don't they? Why, Mrs. O'Rourke, she's about the poorest of 'em in this village, and she's the pernickettiest dresser of all. Real fussy, she is. Oh, don't you go to bankin' on that net. And anyway, that man I saw was a *man*! so there now!"

Stone drew a long breath and started afresh:

"Miss Busby," he said, as calmly as if he were about to ask the most casual question, "were you in love with Nevin Lawrence?"

If he was looking for an explosion, he got it.

"In love with Nevin Lawrence!" she almost screamed. "Me! I should say not! In love with him! Why I wouldn't have picked him up with the tongs!

"Love him? That brute! That puppy! That scum of the earth!"

So now Stone knew she loved him.

"Was he really as bad as all that?" he asked, sympathetically.

"Oh, he was! The mean, lying, despicable—"

"Come, come, now, Miss Busby, the man's dead, don't—"

"I will!" she was screaming now. "He treated me scandalous—just scandalous—" hysterical tears choked her speech.

"Was he scornful—"

"Scornful ain't no word! He was contemptible—he was—he was mean—meaner'n pussley!"

The New Englander can go no further. Pussley is the last word in meanness, and having applied it to the late Nevin Lawrence, Miss Busby felt relieved.

She also felt alarmed.

"What you askin' all this for?" she cried. "I say I want to know! What do you mean by comin' here and questionin' me like this? Hey?"

She was still wrought up to a high, nervous pitch, and Stone wanted to keep her there, as he hoped for results from her excited state.

"Well," he said, and his manner was irritating, "you see—if he was so mean to you—if you hated him so—"

Busybody Busby was not lacking in intuition.

"You mean I killed him!" she said, in an awe-stricken whisper. "Me! Kill *him*!"

Stone's theory collapsed with a sudden crash.

No woman could kill a man whom she loved as Lizzie Busby quite evidently loved this man.

It showed in every lineament of her agonized face, in her clenched hands, in her trembling, hushed voice, and in her wide-open pale-blue eyes, now streaming with tears.

"No, Mr. Stone," she said, dully, "no, I didn't kill him. Nor her neither—" Then a paroxysm of anger seized her. "But I'm glad he's dead," she cried, excitedly, "I'm darn glad he's dead!"

Her eyes glittered now, and Stone pressed his advantage.

"Why?" he urged, "why are you glad he's dead?"

"He scoffed at me," she said, looking reminiscent, "all the time he made fun of me—he didn't know—he didn't appreciate what I could have been to him—oh, men are all alike! Cold, hard, indifferent—yes, I'm glad Nevin Lawrence is dead—but I didn't kill him! I tell you I *didn't* kill him!"

The shriek that accompanied this was almost maniacal, so much so, that Stone suddenly revised his opinion of her innocence. Was she a consummate liar? Has she known that furthest fury of a woman scorned and wreaked her vengeance on the scorner? How could he find out? She was so diabolically clever, so plausibly deceitful. And a woman like that, in love, has her shrewdness intensified by her affec-

tion, her adroitness sharpened by her emotions, until she is almost superhuman.

"If you had killed him, Lizzie," he said, insinuatingly, "you would have had to kill her, too—because she saw you."

"Yes," she returned, but she spoke as one in a trance, "yes, they all say that because she saw him killed, she had to be killed too—killed too—"

Her voice trailed away in an indistinct murmur, and for the life of him, Stone couldn't form the least conclusion whether he was listening to a deep-dyed criminal or merely an hysterical woman in love.

Nor, he decided, could he learn more from her now. She was too ready to talk, she talked too much at random, he could place no confidence in her statements or her implications.

He made one last effort.

She was sitting quiet, for a moment, staring into vacancy, hands clasped and lips slightly parted.

Stone leaned forward until his dark, glowering face nearly touched her own, and said, slowly:

"*You* were that queer man, Lizzie Busby! You yourself! You did it all. Now, where did you put those shoes?"

"What?"

The word was not screamed, rather it seemed to come up from the very depths of her soul, and she stared at him, hollow-eyed and pale-faced.

“Yes, that man you describe so perfectly, was just yourself—*you*—in a man’s coat and hat—and shoes! You killed Nevin Lawrence!”

“Did I?” she said, hollowly, “well, maybe I did. You go now.”

Still with that trance-like air, she rose, and opened the door for him. Stone went out—he felt he could stand no more just then. Where was this leading him?

Leaving the Busby house, placed as it was between Woodbine cottage and Gray Porches, but much further back than either, Stone was uncertain which way to turn.

But Emma Lily, coming out of the Gray’s back door, waved her apron at him and beckoned.

He went slowly toward her, not sure he wanted to talk to anyone just then.

“Them women wants to see you—” she flung an indicative hand toward one of the porches. “Go along in.”

Following her intent, Stone went in at the kitchen door, through a dining room, and out onto a small porch where several of the boarders were grouped.

Mrs. Endicott took the initiative.

“What are you doing over at Lizzie Busby’s?” she demanded, and Stone, taken aback at such sudden inquisition, stared at her.

“Now, don’t look like that,” Mrs. Endicott went

on. She had suddenly become dictatorial. "I say, did you go over there to ballyrag that poor woman?"

"Mrs. Endicott," the detective said, "are you my keeper?"

The slight, courteous smile on his face made her turn red, and the Boston lady felt uncomfortable.

Mrs. Trent interposed.

"We only want to know, Mr. Stone," she said, gently, "because we are all fond of Miss Busby, and we know about her—her unfortunate admiration for Mr. Lawrence—and we want to ask you not to trouble her more than is necessary."

"And just how much do you concede to be necessary, Mrs. Trent?" So now, it was Mrs. Trent's turn to look uncomfortable.

But she rose to the occasion.

"That we don't know, Mr. Stone. I suppose you must do your duty—but, surely, you can't suspect that poor little woman!"

"I can suspect anybody, Mrs. Trent," he said, calmly. "If my suspect is innocent, it can do no harm, can it?"

"Yes, it can. Suspicion always harms a person—sometimes even more, if there are no facts behind it."

"Facts are so hard to prove," Stone said, slowly. "Now, here is a fact—" he drew the hair net from his pocket. As he did so, he ran his quick eyes around

from head to head of the dozen women present. But all had hats on, so he could see nothing of their hair.

And as in the case of Lizzie Busby, they paid small attention to it. "What about it?" Miss Lowe asked, curiously.

"It was found beneath the dead body of Mrs. Sayre."

Again Stone's glance flew from face to face, but he found no look of recognition or of embarrassment or self-consciousness.

He could not have said himself what he was looking for, but he was always alert.

"What does that mean to you?" asked Mrs. Endicott, who had recovered from her snub.

"Everything or nothing," he replied, sententially, thinking it time to mystify them a little.

"That's a big order," said Mrs. Trent, smiling. "I can understand how it might mean nothing, but how could it mean everything?"

"Only this. If a woman killed—"

A horrified shriek from all present drowned his words.

"Oh," and "No!" came from startled lips in chorus.

"Women have committed crimes," Stone went on, quietly, "even more horrendous crimes than men. You all know this, so your protestations lose weight."

"And you think a woman did it, and left that net behind her?" exclaimed Mrs. Trent, her face full of horror.

"It may be so," and Stone returned the net to his pocket-book. "Or the net may have come there in a dozen innocent ways. I suppose," he looked reflectively around, "these hair nets are all alike?"

"By no means," said Miss Hemingway, promptly. "There are various makes and shapes, beside, of course, various colors. The Neptune nets are the best ones."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Miss Lowe. "I always wear the Pandora."

Stone listened to a little further discussion of this momentous question, and wished he had taken a complete course in Hair Nettery along with the rest of his detective education.

"What do you think was the motive for the fearful crime, Mr. Stone?" asked Lura Endicott. She had asked him this question a dozen times before, but she never could think of another.

"Hard to say. Not robbery, for nothing is missing but a pearl pin, and that may be put away somewhere. Though, perhaps Mrs. Sayre had other rings on her fingers. Does any one know? She was buried with only her wedding ring."

"What?" exclaimed Mrs. Trent.

"Yes, only the one. Why does that surprise you?"

"Only because in these days, nearly every woman wears rings."

"But not to bed," said Mrs. Endicott. "I suppose the police have all those properties in their charge—jewelry, clothing and such things."

"Yes," Stone said, a little absently. "It is the strangest case. Why does no relative, however, distant, come forward to claim the personal property?"

"The whole estate belongs to our public library," said Mrs. Gray, who had just joined them. "Oh, don't talk about it! It's all too awful!" And with her eyes full of tears the good woman hurried away again.

"She knew them personally, you see, said Miss Hemingway, as if to apologize for the lack of emotion on the part of the rest of them.

"But you don't seriously suspect Lizzie Busby, do you?" and Mrs. Endicott returned to her first question.

"Look here, Mrs. Endicott," Stone said, "if a complete stranger had killed Mr. Lawrence, and if Mrs. Sayre had seen the deed, or heard the shot, wouldn't she have raised a disturbance? Wouldn't she have screamed so that the neighbors must have heard her? But if the assassin was some one known

to Mrs. Sayre, she would be transfixed with horror, but she would act differently."

"Perhaps so," Mrs. Endicott said, dubiously.

"Again, if a man had attacked Mrs. Sayre, she never could have put up the desperate fight that the evidence proves she did put up. It looks far more like a woman-to-woman encounter than the work of a brutal man."

"I don't see that," said Mrs. Trent, in her decided way. "Miss Busby said at the start, the man was of a furtive, skulking nature. That doesn't sound like a big, brutal man."

"But he was big, Miss Busby said," Stone returned, "and he must have been brutal. However, those points apply to either man or woman. I'm interested now in this net. Miss Hemingway, is this a Neptune?"

He handed her the cobweb net, and after an examination, she said decidedly, "no, that is a Pandora."

"Of course it is," agreed Miss Lowe.

"Thank you," said Fleming Stone.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE WEDDING RING

INTO the funny little village shop, which kept everything from hats to shoes, Fleming Stone went.

The girl behind the counter smiled, bridled, and patted at her ear puffs as the grave, good-looking man bowed politely.

"Have you hair nets?" he asked, quite casually.

"Yes, sir," the girl stared at him. "What color?"

"Gray, and I want to see all the different makes that you keep."

Marveling at the indiosyncrasies of city men, she brought out the entire stock of the shop. Not many sorts—only three in all.

"Which is the Pandora?" Stone asked.

"This. And this is the Neptune, and this the Fairy. Neptune's the best."

"Can you tell me," and Stone took the net from his own pocket-book, "what kind this is? It seems different from these of yours."

"It is." She looked at it carefully. "I never saw one like this. It's stronger and better made than these we carry. Must cost about twice as much."

"And you don't know the name of it, or the name of the maker?"

"No sir, I don't. Like's not it's a new one, just put on the market."

"I can't see that it is very different from these you have."

"No, sir, you couldn't tell 'em apart, but to anybody who knows about 'em, the difference is plain."

Stone thanked her and went away. He went straight to the post-office. There, he wrote a letter to one of his assistants in New York, and taking a pair of scissors from his pocket, he cut the hair net in two and enclosed half of it in the letter.

That ought to settle it, he told himself, and turned, to see Lewis at his elbow.

"Hello, Mr. Stone. I'm just back from New York, and I have the Lawrence stories—all of them."

"Have you read them?"

"Yes; but to me they tell nothing. I think you'd better read them yourself. Not a hard job, they're really interesting."

"Any allusions to those little Tanagra figurines in any of them?"

"Only in one that appeared in the magazine two months ago. There's quite a lot in that one."

"Give me that first, then."

"You still think that broken statuette is a clue?"

"I think it may be. You see, there was no struggle in Lawrence's room. I've learned that the figure usually stood in the middle of a table, not where

it was at all likely to be knocked off accidentally by anyone passing. There was nothing else upset or out of place, so I can't help thinking that ornament was thrown down purposely, by an angry hand. It looks to me like a vicious act. Maybe I'm wrong, but I tell you, Lewis, this is an unusually obscure case. To me, it looks this way. All dark, but if we get one ray of light—a true ray—it will clear up the whole matter at once."

"That's going some!"

"Yet, I feel it's true. We haven't struck the right path yet, of that I'm certain."

"Busybody Busby?"

"I've still got my eye on her—but I don't think she did it. She loved that man too much to kill him."

"I can't agree to that, Mr. Stone. I've heard how she adored him, and he had no use for her—why should he have? Now, I hold that the woman whose love is not returned, is transformed, sometimes, into a very devil, quite capable of killing the man she loves."

"It may be," Stone agreed; "as I say, I've still an eye on her. The gray net, may be hers."

He gave Lewis the history of the hair net.

"That settles it," Lewis declared. "Who else that wears a gray net had any reason to hate Nevin Lawrence? Oh, it was the Busby all right. You'll come back to that conclusion, finally."

They separated, Stone going to Woodbine cottage, to look over the rooms again. He had done this a dozen times, but he had a queer feeling that if he soaked himself in the atmosphere of the house, some sort of inspiration would come to him. He had never been so baffled with a case before. There were many ways to look, but none seemed the right way.

He was thinking about that strange business of Mrs. Sayre's wedding ring. Why was it off her finger and on the floor out of her reach, when Emma Lily found her? Had Emma Lily told the truth about that? Yet, why in the name of common sense would she make up such a yarn?

And stranger still was the undertaker's statement of the initials inside. Stone had made light of that, saying perhaps they were the initials of nick-names or pet names, but really, he considered it a very important matter.

"E. R. from J. T."

Yet only lately, Stone had had occasion to check up on a similar matter, and he had gone to one of the largest jewelers' shops in New York.

He had learned there, that the inscriptions in wedding rings were only about fifty per cent. the real initials of the married pair. Often there were no names or initials; just Mizpah, or Forever, or I Love You, or some such sentiment. Again there were initials that stood for pet names. Stone remembered

one was S. H. from B. M. and he had been told that it meant Sweetheart from Big Man.

So, the E. R. from J. T. might be some such matter, or—it might be an important clue.

For it might mean that Mrs. Sayre was not the real name of the sister of Nevin Lawrence.

But this was only conjecture and could get nowhere without some corroborating evidence.

Mrs. Sayre was so highly esteemed by the whole community, Stone felt that there was small chance of her living under a false identity.

Yet he had an impelling feeling that he must hunt out more about her.

Seeing him in the window, Emma Lily came over from Gray Porches.

"I say," she began, without ceremony, "don't you tie up Lizzie Busby to this awful thing. She hadn't no more to do with it than I had."

"Look here, Emma Lily, how do you know that? Miss Busby was pretty fond of Mr. Lawrence—"

"Well, what of that?"

"And he didn't care for her—in any serious way."

"You bet he didn't! Him? Why, he was as far above her as the stars are above the earth."

"Yes, and so, when she made love to him—"

"Oh, come now, she wouldn't do that—"

"You know she did, Emma Lily. You know Lizzie Busby did beg him to care for her—"

This was a long shot on Stone's part, but it hit the mark.

"I never was sure of that," the woman said, thoughtfully, "but I daresay she did."

"Of course she did. Well, when he refused to listen to her, mightn't she have been so angry, so furious, that she—"

"No! never in a thousand years! But, look here, Mr. Stone, Lizzie Busby adores a sensation. She loves to be talked about, to be—you know, in the public eye. And she'd love to be suspected of this crime, just to be a nine days' wonder—"

"Why, what do you mean? An accused criminal, just to get in the limelight!"

"Exactly that," Emma Lily nodded her head vigorously. "You can't understand a nature like that, I s'pose. But I know Busybody better'n you do, and I'm sure of what I say. And I'm sure she didn't kill those blessed people."

"But when I taxed her with it, she said, 'Well, maybe I did,' wasn't that confession?"

"Didn't I tell you!" triumphantly, "she said that to get you going. Of course it wasn't confession, it was just to keep you talking about her. She can't help bein' like that, she always has been."

"All right, probably she is innocent. Now,

Emma Lily, tell me honestly, what do you think of that wedding ring business? Why was Mrs. Sayre's ring off her finger and on the floor?"

"I don't know." Emma Lily's face was solemn. "I've thought that over a heap. I can't think of anything but that it was sort of loose, and it came off in the struggle she put up."

"I suppose so. Do you know whether it was loose or not?"

"No, I don't. I've been here about two years, and Mrs. Sayre hadn't fell away none that I ever noticed. But maybe she was thinner than she was when she was married."

"How long had she been married?"

"I don't know at all. But her husband was killed in the war, so she must'a been married quite a good many years."

"Do you know anything about her husband?"

"Nothing more than that—that he was killed in the war."

"Is there a picture of him about the house?"

"I never saw any."

"Doesn't that seem strange? Did you never speak to Mrs. Sayre of him?"

"Once I did—about a year ago. I says, 'ain't you got a photograph of Mr. Sayre, ma'am?' and she says, quick like—'oh, no, I couldn't bear to have one around.' So I never mentioned it again."

"And do you think she meant that she cared for him so much that it hurt her to see his picture—or, that she didn't care for him?"

Emma Lily didn't reply at once. Then she said, "well, at first, I thought she loved him so, it made her cry to see his picture, and then—"

"Yes, and then—"

"Well, I don't know how to put it. But when a woman never speaks of her husband at all—and I never heard her mention him to her brother or to anybody—and never has his picture, even hidden away—why, it seems like she couldn't'a cared much about him."

"And how do you know she didn't have a picture hidden away?"

"Well, I never saw none. I've been around her room when she was cleanin' out cupboards and bureau drawers, and all that, and I never saw a sign of his picture. And land, sir, haven't the detectives ransacked her belongings lately? And did they find any?"

"There seem to be no photographs at all around," Stone said, musingly.

"Well, no, there ain't. There's a picture of Mr. Lawrence in Mrs. Sayre's room, and a little picture of her in his room, but as you say, there aren't any others. I don't know why they never seemed to have any friends outside of New Midian."

"That is one of the strangest elements in the case," Stone observed. "Could they have been hiding here—"

"No, sir! You just get any such notion as that out of your head!

"Whatever was the reason they wanted to shake their friends and relations—if they had any relations, it wasn't any wrong doing, of that I'm certain. Why, Mr. Lawrence was the finest gentleman in the world. He couldn't ever have done anything wrong—he simply couldn't have! And as for Mrs. Sayre, she was just a born angel! I won't have anybody say one word against them two beautiful people! That I won't!"

"But," on an impulse Stone decided to tell her this, "do you know Emma Lily, inside Mrs. Sayre's ring it said, 'E. R. from J. T.'?"

"My land! Then she wore some other woman's ring? Likely her mother's. I know a girl that was married with her mother's ring—"

"I never thought of that," and Fleming Stone was chagrined at his own defective imagination. "That may be the solution."

"Or it might have been Mr. Sayre's mother's ring—no, no, then the man's name would'a begun with an S."

"Why, Emma Lily, you're a real detective! That's good work."

"Nothin' very smart about that. Anyway, don't you go to thinkin' things about that angel woman. Whatever was in that ring, was right and proper, that's what it was! I say, that's what it *was*!"

"Well, what's your theory of the murder, Emma Lily? Who do you suppose did it, or could have done it?"

"I don't know. I haven't the slightest idea. And you haven't either. This case, Mr. Detective, is a huckleberry above your persimmons. Now, you let it alone. You go back where you came from, and leave this thing lay.

"For why not? There's no near kin who wants the crime avenged. There's no parents or children of them two, who wants to find out. It's unusual, but its so. 'S far's we know, nobody on earth, exceptin' mere neighbors has any call to go ferretin' about—"

"The state considers it a duty—"

"Oh, the state! Much they care! Let 'em alone, and see how quick they drop it. You came up here—I know all about it—to get Bark Hazelton out of it—and that little Lee girl. Well, you've done it, the state won't ever hark back to them again—"

"You don't know that."

"Well, anyway, you'll never get at the truth of the matter. It was somebody from outside New Midian—be sure of that."

"Someone then, connected with the past life of—"

"Now, you shut up! I tell you I won't hear anything against them two! More likely it was a reg'lar thug—if that's what they call 'em."

"Meaning a burglar or highwayman?"

"Yes. Where's that pearl stickpin of Mr. Lawrence's? The thief took it. Then Mr. Lawrence woke up and the thief shot him. Then Mrs. Sayre come a runnin' to see what the rumpus was, and he shot her. There's the whole thing."

"It may be. And your thief smashed the little statue?"

"Why not? Somebody smashed it. I didn't."

"You may be right. And I promise not to trouble Miss Busby further, unless I get some new and direct evidence against her. Now, I'm going to go over Mrs. Sayre's things again. You go on back to the Gray's."

"All right. But you won't find nothin' new. Lewis went over 'em, and I looked through 'em myself."

But Stone went up to the pretty room that had been Janet Sayre's and instituted a new quest for some sign or some token of her husband.

He found nothing—nothing at all that could by any possibility be a memento of any man.

There was a picture of a handsome young fellow,

whose features were readily recognizable as Lawrence at the age of about twenty.

There was a picture of a child, marked on the back, "Herbert, four years old."

Stone looked at this carefully. Could it have been Mrs. Sayre's child?

He thought not, for it had an old-fashioned air, and, too, it had a resemblance to Nevin Lawrence, perhaps another brother, who had died young.

There was no photographer's mark on this picture, it had been cut off. This was a point, to Stone's mind. Why cut off the address?

The picture of Lawrence as a young man had a photographer's name, and also the word Chicago.

This Stone put in his pocket, and after a moment's hesitation, took also the picture of the child.

They must be relatives, he concluded. There are so few photographs about, they can't be merely casual friends.

A search of Lawrence's room gave up no new portraits whatever. The photograph of Mrs. Sayre still stood on his chiffonier, but no others could be found. This photograph was a fairly recent one, he judged, and it had been taken in New York.

Wearily, Stone looked over the books again. Many of them had Lawrence's name scribbled on the fly-leaf, some had his initials. Several had their fly-leaves torn out.

This fact struck Stone as peculiar. A book or two with a missing fly-leaf is not strange, but here there were a dozen or more whose fly-leaves were torn out. Why?

Probably for a perfectly good reason, Stone told himself. Bought second-hand, maybe, or given to him by somebody who had no further use for them.

One little volume bore the words "From Elaine." They were quite evidently written by Lawrence himself, and though Stone made a note of it he couldn't hope that it meant much. The book was *The Love Sonnets of Proteus*, a small volume of impassioned poetry. There was no written date and the book might have been a gift from Lawrence's wife, either before or after their marriage. And here Stone was struck by a sudden thought.

There was apparently no portrait of Lawrence's wife among the effects. This was as strange as the absence of any picture of the late Mr. Sayre.

Stone began to rummage harder. He looked into books, into boxes, through papers in all the desk drawers and pigeon holes—not a picture could he find.

"Queer!" he exclaimed to himself, "mighty queer."

He even went up into the attic and hunted through the trunks and boxes up there. But all to no avail. For some reason, both brother and sister, he con-

cluded, had shaken off all connection with their former life and people.

What could be the reason? he speculated. Was there some family secret, some disgrace, that this brother and sister did not have a share in and had run away from? It was mysterious, and he saw no glimmer of light.

Back to Hazel Hill he went, and held confab with the men there.

The two Hazeltons and Stanhope were deeply interested.

"It's deuced odd," Barker said, after hearing all, "but one thing I know, whatever there may have been in Mr. Lawrence's past there never was a flaw in Mrs. Sayre. She was as white and pure as an angel—"

"Everybody seems to think her angelic," Stone smiled. "And I'm not casting any aspersions. I think, with you, if there was anything shady in their past, it was Lawrence's doing not his sister's. Suppose there was a cloud over him, it would be just like a good woman, her own husband dead, to stand by her brother."

"That husband may have been the wrong one," suggested Stanhope. "Say he was a scoundrel, and Lawrence was standing by his sister. How's that?"

"Good enough," Stone said, "but all imagination. Now, I've just combed that house again for clues,

and found nothing—or almost nothing. A couple of old photographs—that's all. But to my mind, the entire absence of all clues to past memories or early years, is a clue in itself."

"Just how?" asked Amos Hazelton, interestedly.

"Why, such utter lack of keepsakes or records, seems to me to prove a desperate desire to eliminate all the past, to put it all out of their memory."

"A desire," Stanhope agreed, "but why a desperate desire? That implies wrong—"

"And I suspect wrong, somewhere, on the part of somebody," Stone told them. "Normally speaking, a brother and sister are going to keep some old trinkets or letters of their parents. They're going to have some old box of relics, some family heirlooms, or at least pictures of their parents."

"It does seem so," Amos said. "But it needn't necessarily mean anything wrong. They may have come from a larger house, and so left behind anything that would crowd them here."

"Or," said Stanhope, "they may have put a box or trunk of such mementos as you speak of, in storage, or, if valuable, in safe deposit."

"All true," Stone conceded, "but I still think it's queer to have nothing with them. Anyway, I'm banking on that fact as a clue, and we'll see if it gets us anywhere?"

"How are you going to work at it?" Barker asked.

"First of all, I'm going to send this picture of Lawrence when young, to Chicago. I hate to let it go, but I shall send it to a man I know and see if he can trace it to the photographer who took it. We may get information from that. If so, I may have to go to Chicago myself. I begin to think we'll have to get at Lawrence's past life. I don't think your New Midianites are responsible for this awful crime. No club-house quarrel," he glanced at Barker, "and no foolish Busby woman are strongly enough indicated for such a cold-blooded, heartless crime."

"You've given up the idea of a woman criminal?" Amos asked.

"Not at all. It seems to me to be the work of a woman. But that's only surmise based on some feminine effects. There's that hair net. It wasn't bought here, and I've sent part of it to New York to learn where it was bought. That may tell us something. Usually I prefer to work these things out alone, but in this case, I enjoy talking it over with you men. Your suggestions are helpful, and I confess I don't know which way to look."

"You seem to have a number of lines out," Stanhope said, "and I see you brought up a lot of magazines."

"Yes, Lawrence's stories—all of them. I mean

to read them carefully, hoping to get something between the lines. Often an author reveals himself in his stories, without intending to do so. Lawrence wasn't interested in the ladies here, at all, was he? "

"No," said Barker. "I shouldn't call him a woman hater, but he was really indifferent to all the girls and women here, both the natives and the summer people. I always thought of him as a man who had buried his heart in his wife's grave."

"Probably that's right," Stone said, a little absently.

CHAPTER XV

MEMENTOES AND SOUVENIRS

STONE sat up a good part of the night reading the Lawrence stories. In one of them, published about two months earlier, there was a long description of the Tanagra figurines, as well as a charming account of the town of Bœotia in Greece, where the little Terra Cotta shapes are found.

The story was idyllic, and quite obviously the work of one who had been there and knew the ground very well.

The detective sat musing, wondering if he held in his hand threads which he could weave into a coherent web.

He was sure the Tanagra figurine was smashed by the murderer in a spasm of rage. Why, he could not imagine, but it seemed to him a positive clue. Yet a clue to what? To whom?

Also, he was sure the lack of all objects having any connection with the past was of important indication. He didn't believe another house in New Midian, or for that matter, in all New England, was utterly without any article whatever, reminiscent of more than two years ago.

Though some of the books were of a by-gone

age, there were no marks or dates written to show early ownership.

It was as if a sponge had wiped away everything in that house that existed more than two years ago.

This, in itself, was so extraordinary that Stone concluded it was his best line of research, and he determined to push it further.

He spent his nights as well as his days partly at Gray Porches and partly at the Woodbine cottage. Also, he took an occasional meal with the Hazeltons, glad to have the benefit of Amos' hard common sense and Stanhope's ingenuity.

But he concluded he had not yet wrung the village dry of its possible information and he started early in the morning to hunt it through again.

The community, as a whole, liked Stone, and willingly entered into conversation on any phase of the now celebrated murder case.

But he soon found, by his adroit questioning that no one in the village knew one iota concerning the life of the brother and sister before they came to New Midian.

Most of them resented the implication that they should know or care.

Their attitude was, that the two had arrived, had made good in every way, and so were entitled to courtesy and respect without curiosity.

Had Lawrence or Mrs. Sayre been disagreeable or unneighborly, some questions might have been raised, but so genuinely were they liked that no one harbored a doubt of their integrity and worth.

The only person who cast even the slightest word of dissatisfaction was Mrs. Lee, mother of Gladys.

As the village dressmaker, Stone hoped she might be a gossip.

This she did not prove to be, but she admitted a certain disappointment in the fact that Mrs. Sayre was not anxious to exchange war stories with her.

"My husband was killed in the war," Mrs. Lee told Stone, "and Mrs. Sayre's was too. I asked her about him, and about his experiences and his death, but she shut up like a clam, and then she changed the subject.

"Several times I tried it, but she simply wouldn't talk about it."

"That is not surprising," Stone told her, "often people do not want their sorrow mentioned, especially the death of a husband."

"I know," Mrs. Lee returned, "but she seemed nervous when I spoke of the war—not sad, but upset."

"I can't see that that is strange," Stone said though he weighed Mrs. Lee's words thoughtfully. "It may be the circumstances of his death were harrowing, and she couldn't bear to think of them."

But he thought this over. It was a little odd.

It was now at least three or four years since the death of her husband, and after that length of time, women are often glad to talk with other women similarly placed. He knew that many war widows eagerly talked with one another about their bereavement.

And then, he came back to the queer lack of mementoes in the house.

If Mrs. Sayre were so sensitive to the subject of her husband's death, would it not seem natural that she should have souvenirs of his life with her, or at least a picture of him?

Perhaps that picture marked Herbert, aged four, was a child picture of her husband. Perhaps she had never had a later one. Some men will not sit for a photograph.

Yet he had thought that four-year-old child looked a little like Lawrence himself, and he had surmised it was another brother. Still, one couldn't judge from a baby picture. It was all very strange. Where was her wedding certificate—but that, doubtless, was in safe deposit with other valuable papers. She must have had some papers—everybody has.

Where was the safe deposit? Or storage warehouse? Why was there no receipt of any kind for such things? Neither Mrs. Sayre nor Lawrence had any such receipts—at least, none had been found. Nor any keys.

The bank they used in New York knew nothing

more of them than the general information that was common property.

Apparently they had been so far above reproach that no one had thought of checking them up.

Nor did Stone know aught against them, save for that queer fact of no background to their lives.

Why did they never get a letter from a cousin or an old school friend? Why did such never visit them? Why did they never go back to see their former home or homes?

That these things never happened, Stone had learned from Emma Lily. He took her with him to make further search in the kitchen quarters of the cottage.

"Show me the old silver," he said; "the old dishes—is there nothing but *new* stuff?"

Search brought out an old-fashioned silver spoon marked "Rowland."

Stone pounced on it. It was, he judged, well over fifty years old, and he jumped to the conclusion that it had belonged to the parents of Lawrence and his sister, or else, it had descended from the family of Mr. Sayre.

"Or Mr. Lawrence's wife," Emma Lily put in. "I do wonder what Mr. Lawrence's wife was like. He never mentioned her, that I ever heard."

There it was again! No mementoes, no souvenirs, no portraits of Nevin Lawrence's wife!

Why, *why* this utter absence of memorabilia?

Stone discussed it with Emma Lily. He treated this servant more as an equal, which in most respects she was. And her brain was quick and intelligent.

She looked at him solemnly.

"It's the queerest thing in the world," she said; "I say, it's the queerest thing! I used to set and wonder about it by the hour. But when I came to know 'em, I knew whatever the secret was, it was no fault of theirs. Somebody did somethin' wrong I make me no doubt—I say I make me no doubt. But who it was, or what they done, I don't know."

"They never had any other things—old things? They never cleared out a lot of them—"

"Never. They brought next to nothin' when they came. Took the house furnished. Then, little by little, they bought new and prettier furnichoor, and let Mr. Gray take back the old stuff. 'Course, he could always use it in his boarders' rooms."

"The rooms here are beautifully furnished."

"Yes, they are. Mrs. Sayre and Mr. Lawrence, they used to go down to New York for two or three days at a time, and when they came back a lot of new furnichoor would follow. Till they got the house all fixed up to suit 'em."

"Did Mrs. Sayre smoke cigarettes?"

"Land no, she wasn't that sort. Quiet like and lady-like—that's what Mrs. Sayre was."

"But lots of fine ladies smoke nowadays."

"Let 'em. Mrs. Sayre didn't, anyhow. A real homebody, she was, no gadding, no skylarking. Just lived for her brother, and him for her."

"They had the same tastes—"

"Always. What one liked the other did. They'd be as happy over a new spring crocus, or over the red leaves in the fall, as if they had a new toy. Awful fond of nature. They'd sometimes go off for long walks, take a bit of lunch and stay out all day. Just home-like, simple-minded folks, and sufficient to themselves."

"Didn't like company?"

"Always glad to see callers, and now and then a dinner party. But they were just as happy alone by themselves. It seemed to me, that as both of 'em had had their life mate, as you might say, and both had lost 'em, they was contented not to try it again, but just stay by each other the rest of their nateral lives—which they did, poor things, though their end wasn't nateral!"

Emma Lily fell to weeping, and Stone asked only one more question.

"Didn't you say that Mrs. Sayre took care of her brother's room?"

"Not to say took care of it, in the sense of sweepin' and cleanin'. But she'd look after the fresh curtains, and keep flowers on his table, and now and then dust around the books, or the like of that. Mrs.

Sayre was a tidy house-keeper, and she loved to look after such things herself."

"Neat and particular, eh? "

"Oh, land, you bet she was! Never scolded, but if I neglected my work, she'd call me down so nice, I couldn't get mad. Why, the silver had to be polished just so—land sakes, that reminds me, there is another old spoon! Here it is—" Emma Lily took it from a drawer, "It's a baby spoon, d' you see? And it's marked 'Herbert.' "

Stone took the little old spoon, with the handle turned back on itself, as "baby spoons" are made, and scrutinized it.

Undoubtedly this had belonged to the child in the picture, named Herbert. Equally probable it was that Herbert was a relative, for choice, a brother.

Well, at least they had two souvenirs of their early life. Herbert Lawrence—that would be. Was he dead? Stone surmised that he was, for such a congenial brother and sister, who cared for the little spoon of their brother, would surely be in touch with him, were he alive.

Killed in the war, maybe. That could be looked up. Or he could set machinery to work that would perhaps locate the dead Herbert Lawrence.

Oh, well, Stone concluded, it was all surmise as to the brother, but the spoons remained, the old one marked Rowland and the little one marked Herbert.

Another name seemed to hover in the back of Stone's brain. Oh, yes—Elaine, that was it. Only the name in a book in Lawrence's room, but—who was Elaine? Not a relative, presumably, for the book of love poems connoted a different conclusion. Elaine, he chose to think might be Lawrence's wife—

“Emma Lily,” he said, suddenly, “where is Mr. Lawrence's watch?”

“The police have it,” she replied. “They have all his little jewelry bits, and hers too.”

“Did Mr. Lawrence have a picture in his watch case, do you know?”

“Yes, he did—but it wasn't his wife, if that's what you're after. It was Mrs. Sayre.”

Another hope gone. Surely Lawrence could not have been very fond of his wife, or else she was not given to being photographed.

Stone fell into a brown study. He was so quiet, and so absorbed, that after a time, Emma Lily stole away and went back to her work next door.

She was regularly employed now at Gray Porches, but was always at the disposal of Stone or the other detectives when wanted.

Fleming Stone acknowledged to himself that he was stumped—utterly at a loss.

But his only gleam of light lay in the fact that there was no light! He still felt that his best clue was the absence of clues.

The secret lay in the past life of the brother and sister. The mystery was there, in their life—not in their death. Discover the secret of their life and the mystery of their death would be clear.

This he was certain of, and the next thing was to find out their past. It was not only unusual, he believed it was unique, that a man of Lawrence's caliber and standing and attainments, should have in his home no scrap of paper, no document, no record that would even corroborate his own name.

Was it his own name? Was he living under an alias? Was that why no answers were received to the advertisement for relatives or heirs?

Why had the man no insurance policies? No certificates of any company or organization? Nothing that would require any personal data.

It was incredible. It was inexplicable, except on the ground that it was all intentional. In that case, Lawrence was hiding. Stone inclined to this theory, that the man was hiding and his sister was standing by him.

Yet, how could Lawrence be a wrong doer, and be so highly esteemed by all who knew him?

But this might be. Suppose he had been a forger, or even a worse criminal. Suppose to conceal his identity, he had settled down in this tiny, inconspicuous village, and his sister, loving him, had thrown in her lot with his. Granting all that, wouldn't they

do exactly as they had done? So deport themselves as to win the respect and love of the little community, yet keep silent as to their earlier days. It all fitted in with this theory, but, he went on, if so, then it was Nemesis who pursued Lawrence, and finally found him and wreaked vengeance on him for whatever his crime had been.

Stone sighed. He had no right to ascribe crime to this man, whom everybody loved, and against whom he had nothing except his lack of souvenirs of his past.

Yet an author often wrote over an assumed name.

True, but his own name was always known to his friends and to his publishers, if not to his public.

Stone ran over the names he had gathered.

Rowland, Herbert, Elaine—he didn't know whether Rowland was a surname or not. Herbert, he assumed was not, as it was on a baby spoon, and child picture.

Herbert Lawrence, he felt quite sure. Elaine Rowland, maybe. Their mother's maiden name, the Rowland might be—but the Elaine was a friend—oh, why think so foolishly? Why jumble names in that absurd manner?

Yet Elaine Rowland stuck in his mind. He liked the name, whether it ever belonged to anybody or not.

He put on his hat and went down to the village post office.

He was nearly frantic with a strange feeling that the knowledge he wanted was almost within his grasp, and yet he didn't know which way to turn for it.

The post office yielded him a letter from his assistant in New York, which brought the news that the hair net in question was one of a superior make, only sold in the best shops. It was called the Samson, and it was manufactured in Chicago, and was more in vogue there than in New York. The one he had submitted was of a color sold only to women having really gray hair—there was another color made for the ash-blondes.

"That lets out the Busybody," he said to himself, though he had really eliminated her before.

And it started another train of thought.

Lawrence was from Chicago, suppose he had made an enemy of some woman there, some one with gray hair—young women had gray hair sometimes—suppose her name was Elaine—Elaine Rowland—

Lord, what a fool he was! The Rowland was the family name—else why the old spoon, so unmistakably an heirloom?

And he must systematize his search. Did he suspect a woman, or did he look toward some man who knew of some crime or misdemeanor in Lawrence's past life?

That hair net must mean something! It couldn't

get there of itself ; it couldn't have been Mrs. Sayre's or Emma Lily's. It couldn't have belonged to any of the villagers, they bought theirs at the little shop.

It must have belonged to a stranger—and to an intruder—and to the person who had the struggle with Mrs. Sayre.

Therefore a woman.

But far more plausible was the theory of the vengeful man tracking down Lawrence, living there under an assumed name.

Clearly, he must get more data before inclining too strongly to either supposition.

The undertaker's shop was near the post office and Stone drifted in there.

He rather liked the little old man, and he wanted to put a question to him.

"Mr. Crouch," he said, after greetings had been exchanged, "you told me that Mr. Lawrence's ring was so tight on his finger, you couldn't get it off. Was Mrs. Sayre's ring tight, too?"

"No, sir, not at all—not at all. And yet, not to say loose, neither. Just a right fit, as a lady'd like to have a ring, sir."

"Was it loose enough to drop off accidentally?"

"Oh, no, sir. Not by no means. In fact, it had to be pulled a little, to get it off, yes, sir, pulled a little, you know."

"Yes, I see—thank you."

Then it hadn't dropped off her finger at the time she met her death—it had been pulled off—by herself or by her assailant. H'm.

"Mr. Stone"—the undertaker hesitated, "I think I ought to tell you something—but I don't know—I don't know—"

"Tell me, and I'll tell you whether you ought to, or not," Stone returned, whimsically, but Crouch did not smile.

"It's a queer thing," he went on, "a mighty queer thing. You know that old chappie with the white face?"

"Well, I know of him. He seems a queer Dick. Lives over Beechfield way—"

"Only boards there for a time—summer boarder—well, he was here yesterday."

"Anything strange about him?"

Stone tried not to appear eager, but he was most anxious to hear the undertaker's story. He judged from his air of troubled uncertainty it was not without interest.

"Yes, there was. He hung around talking about all sorts of things, but always coming back to the Lawrence matter.

"You thought you knew them? I said to him, for I heard how he went to look at the bodies, that first morning.

"'No,' he said, sorter sighing like, 'no.' And

then he said suddenly, ' what did you say the letters was in the lady's ring? ' And I told him. And then he sighed again, why, just as if he was losin' his mind — ' see? ' "

" Now, what do you mean by that? " asked Stone. " People don't sigh because their minds are affected."

" No, I s'pose not. But I can't make it any clearer. He sighed, and then he sort'a muttered, and it did sound as if he didn't quite know what he was saying."

" What did he say? "

" He said, ' a scar on her shoulder, eh? a scar on her white shoulder? ' and I says ' yes ' kind'a short like, for it was none of his business, that! "

" It certainly was not! Did he say anything more? "

" Yes, that's what I'm coming to. He said, still mumbling like, ' and a broken wrist—' and his voice trailed off like he was falling asleep."

" But Mrs. Sayre's wrist wasn't broken."

" Not lately, sir, but it had been. And you could see a mite of crookedness where it had been set. Nothing to notice, for it had been a good job—the setting of it—but, of course, I noticed it, when we was a laying her out—yes sir. Now, how did that man know it? "

Stone stared at the undertaker.

" Either," he said, at last, " either you had mentioned that fact to somebody, and Taylor had heard

of it, or—" he looked strangely excited, "that is a man we want to get hold of! Where is he?"

"Laws, I don't know. He went away, and I didn't think any more about it. But I never mentioned that broken wrist to anybody—not to anybody at all."

"He could have heard of it in the village—I suppose it was common knowledge among the lady's friends."

"I doubt that, sir. It hardly showed at all. Nobody but a surgeon or an undertaker would have noticed it."

"Are you implying that this man knew of it because he had known Mrs. Sayre?"

"I don't say that, but the way he said it, and—the way he said, 'a scar on her shoulder—on her white shoulder—' why it sounded as if he might have known her—"

"Oh, pshaw, you're overworking your imagination. He's not the sort of man who would know Mrs. Sayre socially, or be on friendly terms with her—"

"Well, you can ask him for yourself, if you like. There he is across the street, now."

Stone looked out the door, and seeing the white-faced man, beckoned him over.

He came readily enough, and lounged into the shop without apparent interest.

Stone looked at him curiously. His white face

was of such a death-like pallor, his dark eyes seemed to burn from their sockets, and altogether, he had an uncanny air and a mysterious manner.

Stone, acting on a sudden impulse, a thing he rarely did, turned to him and said, directly :

“ What do you know of Elaine Rowland? ”

With a hollow shriek, the man threw out his hands wildly, his jaw sagged, and he fell to the floor in convulsions.

CHAPTER XVI

THE PEARL PIN

NEW MIDIAN boasted a small hospital, the pride of the village, and to this Taylor was taken.

His case was diagnosed as epilepsy, but he was also said to be on the verge of an attack of brain fever.

This precluded any questioning of the patient, at least for the present, but Stone did not mind that, since he had the man where he couldn't get away and would be able to question him later.

The whole case was now in Stone's hands.

Fraser had reconvened his adjourned inquest, but it had resulted in an open verdict. Lewis was ready and willing to act merely as Stone's assistant, and willingly obeyed all instructions.

And Stone was working harder than he had ever before worked on a mystery.

He was sure now that the secret lay in Lawrence's past life, and he was determined to get some light on those past years.

He knew now that Taylor, the white-faced man, was in some way mixed up in the matter, or at least that he knew the brother and sister.

To be sure he had said he didn't, when he called to look at the bodies the morning after the tragedy,

but it was clear to Stone that he did know them, and called to identify them.

Stone did not as yet suspect him of the crime or of any part in it. Such a weak, trembling, inefficient character, could never have accomplished that awful deed; beside which, the doctor said the man was subject to epileptic fits, and practically incapable of the crime.

Stone did not entirely eliminate the possibility, for he had heard of epileptics being possessed of homicidal tendencies and also of sudden unexpected strength and energy.

But Taylor was certainly not the queer man Miss Busby had seen—and of late, Stone had come to believe in that queer man, and he felt pretty sure he was the murderer.

He still felt that the soundest clue was the fact that this man had worn a pair of Lawrence's shoes, a newer pair than any found in the cottage, and if he could but trace those shoes, he could put his hand on the murderer.

Also, he was partially convinced that the shoes had been worn by a woman. To him the evidence for this belief seemed strong, and he banked too, on the hair net.

If a woman, she had had some grievance against either the brother or sister or both. For choice, the

brother, and then the fury of a woman scorned would account for the desperate character of the crime.

Taylor being safely in the hospital, Stone went back to Gray Porches and told the story of the white-faced man and his strange seizure in the undertaker's shop.

As usual his circle of auditors were greatly interested, and expressed comments both sensible and absurd.

"I think that man's the criminal," Mrs. Trent said, in her positive way. "I hope, Mr. Stone, you'll bring him to trial. I'm real sorry I have to go away the last of this week, I'd like to see how the matter turns out—I hope you'll keep me posted, Mrs. Endicott."

"I will, Mrs. Trent, but I can't agree with you that that foolish-looking individual ever had spunk enough to perpetrate that crime! Why, he doesn't look as if he had sense enough to come in when it rains!"

"He does look like a Bœotian!" Mrs. Trent said, smiling. "But you never can tell."

"What's a Bœotian?" inquired Miss Lowe, who was fond of absorbing stray information.

"The natives of Bœotia, in Greece," Mrs. Trent returned, not at all averse to showing off her erudition, "are supposed to be born fools, like the Gothamites of England, or the Schildburgers of Germany."

"Goodness!" Miss Lowe exclaimed, "I never heard of any of them."

"There are noodles of nearly every country," Mrs. Trent explained further, "but the Bœotians are slandered, I think. I've been there, and I think they are as brainy as the average human being."

"Which isn't saying much!" Mrs. Endicott laughed. "You've travelled everywhere, I do believe, Mrs. Trent."

"Oh, no, not that. But I have jogged around quite a bit, and as soon as I can arrange it, I'm starting off again, around the world this time."

"Visiting Bœotia again?" asked Stone.

"No, matters in Greece are too unsettled. I shall stick to the beaten tracks, probably go on one of those big excursions."

"What do you enjoy most, the scenery or the people?" asked Miss Hemingway, who was only waiting a chance to tell of her own travels.

"Most of all I care for the buildings," Mrs. Trent returned. "The cathedrals, temples, castles—all that sort of thing. I'm fond of architecture—"

"Foreign architecture is all right," Miss Lura Endicott broke in, "but what a pity we have none worthwhile in this country!"

"Oh, how can you say so?" Mrs. Trent cried. "Why, we have lots of splendid examples! The Lincoln Memorial, the Arlington Amphitheatre, the pub-

lic buildings in all our large cities! Why, in Chicago—”

“Oh, I don’t mean modern stuff,” Lura said, scornfully. “I mean the work of past centuries, the—”

“You can’t have age-old architecture in a new and young country,” Mrs. Trent said, caustically, and seeing there was a spirited discussion toward, Stone slipped away.

He found, in his mail, a letter from his agent in Chicago, who was trying to trace the picture of Nevin Lawrence when he was a young man of about twenty. Had the quest been successful the man would have telegraphed Stone, as it was he was still searching.

He wrote that the firm of photographers who had taken the picture had long ago passed out of existence. But there were still hopes of finding some later photographer, who had taken over that old stock, and might have the records, or, he hoped he might find someone who recognized the likeness.

Also, he stated, that all endeavors to locate Nevin Lawrence or Mrs. Sayre had failed utterly. No old or new directories or telephone books gave either name. No large shops had the names on their lists of charge accounts or transient customers.

No churches had them listed in their congregations. No libraries numbered them among their

subscribers. No clubs showed their names as members.

Altogether it did not look as if they had ever lived there. Yet, Chicago was a big city, and they need not have been prominent people.

Still, Stone thought, people of their standing and mental caliber, would have left some tiny footprint on the sands of time, even in a metropolis.

Which brought him back to the notion that Lawrence was an assumed name. Possibly Sayre was too, but his thoughts always gave her the benefit of a doubt, and he held it more likely that the man was the transgressor, if either, and the woman stood by him in love and loyalty.

He went over to Woodbine and set up a new search among Lawrence's belongings. But all his clothing, brushes, trunks—everything that showed cause for name or initials, was marked with his name or with N. L.

The same way in Mrs. Sayre's case. All her *lingerie*, her trinkets, her books, showed her name or J. S.

Why then, was her wedding ring marked E. R. ?

And Stone concluded that the most likely explanation was that it had been her mother's.

Elaine Rowland—if there ever had been such a person, might well have been her mother—or, her husband's mother. The old-fashioned silver spoon

marked Rowland was of an era which would correspond to that idea, and—Stone romanced now—perhaps Janet Lawrence was married in haste, owing to the exigencies of the war. Her husband had been killed in the war, but no one knew how long or short a time she had been married to him.

Anyway, there could be nothing wrong about that lovely woman or about her wedding ring.

Yet, if not, why no picture or souvenir of the late Mr. Sayre?

And then a new thought struck him. Suppose the marriage had not been a happy one. Suppose Sayre had been cruel to her, and she had no reason to mourn him or remember him.

Oh, what was the use of supposing? He was foolish to waste time in it. He must strive harder to get information about the past.

He felt ashamed of himself to progress so slowly. Other missing persons had been found, other identities had been disclosed, other mysteries had been cleared up. Surely he was not going to fall down on this one, the biggest and most interesting case he had ever had to work on!

And the clues! They were so numerous and so utterly unreadable!

He counted them over in his mind.

The broken statuette, the missing pearl pin, the strangely pulled off wedding ring, the new shoes

like Lawrence's, the lack of past history, the queer man, the books—surely he must learn something more from the books!

He was going stale! No inspiration came to him, no ingenious idea occurred to him, no new train of thought opened itself up.

Except for a slight hope of his Chicago agent finding out something, he didn't know which way to look.

Emma Lily came over from Gray Porches.

"Well," she said, breathlessly, "I've found something! And I brung it straight to you, and don't you think I took it, 'cause I didn't—I say, I *didn't*."

"What is it, Emma Lily?" Stone was a little weary of her eternal suggestions.

"Why, it's this." Emma Lily held up a pearl stickpin. "Here's Mr. Lawrence's pin."

Stone woke into life.

"Is it?" he cried, "is that the missing pin?"

"Sure it is. And where do you s'pose I found it?"

"Where?"

"Right on Mrs. Endicott's pincushion."

"Then it can't be the one."

"Oh, can't it? But I know it is—I say, I *know* it is! Why, I know that pin as well as I know one of my own!"

"But on Mrs. Endicott's cushion!"

"Oh, good land! Of course, *she* didn't put it there! I say, *she* never put it there! It was—what do you call it—? planted—I say it was planted."

"Who planted it—you?"

"Oh, hush, don't be silly! You detectives don't know anything, do you?"

"Not much," Fleming Stone said, humbly.

"Well, then, here's how it came about. I felt that pin had been stole by somebody round about here—whether the same one as killed them or not. So I thought I'd try a roose to find out—yes, sir, a roose. So I did, and this was it: I told right out to all the servants and all the boarders too, over at Gray Porches, that the police was goin' to search all their belongin's for that pin. Such a howl as they put up. I say, *such* a howl! I nearly died a laughin' at 'em!"

"Ingenious!" Stone's eyes shone. "Well?"

"Well, I could see the boarders was upset as well as the servants, an' they raised a protest—that's what they did, raised a protest. Me, I didn't say anythin' more, just said I heard it was goin' to be soon. Well, sir, that was last evenin' and this mornin' when I goes in to make up Mrs. Endicott's bed, there's that pin a stickin' on her cushion. Now, of course, the vilyun who stole it put it there, 'count o' bein' scared."

"Of course. Whom do you suspect?"

"That's just it. I dunno—I say I *dunno*."

Emma Lily looked deeply puzzled. "You see, Mrs. Endicott had just gone down street. She and Mrs. Trent they went out for a morning walk, same's like they most always do, and I us'ally takes that time to make their beds. And I found it."

Stone had not the slightest suspicion of Emma Lily's own innocence in the matter. She was unquestionably sincere and truthful, and, too, he knew she never would steal from the people she had loved so well.

His thoughts raced back to the morning the murder had been discovered. If only he could have been there then! All he knew of it was by hearsay.

The account had been told him repeatedly, however, and he knew that Ben Gray had been the first on the scene, the first in the bedrooms, after Emma Lily had given the alarm, and he wondered if the man's cupidity had led him to catch up the valuable pearl, and then, owing to Emma Lily's hint of a police search, if Gray had secretly disposed of the incriminating thing by putting it in Mrs. Endicott's room.

Of course, Mrs. Endicott was not to be considered as implicated in any way, indeed she was the last one to suspect.

It must have been Gray himself, or some of the servants. Stone knew the servants at Gray Porches, and they were mostly young girls from the village.

But there were also a few men servants and a chore boy and two or three women. For all he knew, they had—any or all of them—opportunity to enter the cottage that morning, when everything was in confusion and excitement and get away with the theft.

But, he realized, if that were the truth, then it amounted to little as a clue to the murder. The theft of the pin, if committed by someone other than the greater criminal, helped him not at all.

“Emma Lily,” he said, at last, “take it to the police. Take it to Mr. Lewis and tell him your story. He can look into that matter—it doesn’t interest me especially—and yet—wait a minute, let me see it.”

“Be careful,” she said, as he reached out his hand for it, “I picked it up by the pin, so’s not to disturb the finger prints on the pearl.”

Stone stared at her in wonderment.

“Emma Lily,” he said, “you’re a born detective! Not one woman in a thousand would have thought of that! My, but you’re clever!”

“Well, you see, whoever put it in Mrs. Endicott’s room was the last one to touch it, and that might mean something.”

“Indeed it might!” and Stone took the pin gingerly between his thumb and forefinger. “Look here, Emma Lily, don’t take this to Lewis just yet, leave it with me. I’ll develop the prints on it if there are any, and for a day or two I’ll look after it.”

"All right, sir," and she nodded in satisfaction. "I won't say a word about it. If Mrs. Endicott knows anything about it, she'll ask me, and if she doesn't—well, I'll keep my eyes open, and I bet you I can smell out who did that thing—I say, I bet you I can!"

"Good! I'd rather have you as an assistant than a good many I've tried. It may mean nothing at all in the long run, and then again it may. Run along, Emma Lily, keep your eyes open, and report to me when you learn anything. But catch me when you can see me alone—if there's any wrongdoer over at the boarding-house, don't let him or her suspect you're on the trail."

"Trust me for that," she called back as she sped across the lawn.

That night Stone dined up at Hazel Hill.

He always enjoyed these occasions, but in this instance, he felt a bit chagrined that he had so little progress to report.

"Of course, Mr. Hazelton," he said to Amos, "Now that nobody suspects Barker or the little Lee girl, you have lost your most poignant interest in the matter—"

"Oh, I'm possessed of a healthy curiosity," Amos interrupted, "and in the interests of humanity, I'd jolly well like to see the murderer of those people

brought to justice. Which way are you looking at present? ”

“ Backward,” Stone said, smiling. “ I do wish, you’d rack your brain for some word, some speech you ever heard from Lawrence or his sister, or something you ever heard about them, that would give me a new direction in which to look.”

“ I wish I could, but you know, we’re only up here summers, and we only met them in a social, rather formal way. You can’t glean much about a man’s past life that way.”

“ If, as you think,” Stanhope said to Stone, “ Lawrence wanted to keep his past quiet, then I don’t suppose you’ll find out anything from any of the New Midianites. He was a man who would be on his guard, and would not be likely to make a slip. I think you’ll have to get your information from outside sources.”

“ Often those outside sources are so hidden in obscurity,” Stone said ruefully. “ Never before have I felt so utterly baffled, so up against a wall. But don’t think for a minute I’m discouraged! No, I’m thinking it’s now just that darkest hour before dawn, and something will break soon. Why the very fact that Lawrence was so secretive here, and that he seems to be untraceable in Chicago, proves to me that he had a secret of some sort—and, granting a secret, I shall find it! Given something to dig for, I can

dig. It's only when I think perhaps they were just the simple, commonplace people they seemed, that I am baffled. And I don't mean they were commonplace people, either, I know too much of their mentality for that. But I mean if their lives were as sincere and uneventful as their life here made them seem, then—well, then I shall be very much mistaken and exceedingly disappointed."

Stone told these friends of everything he had found out. He was not one inclined to secrecy, and he hoped their wisdom and judgment might offer him a hint which he would be far from disinclined to accept.

But all they could suggest was a further investigation of the strange, white-faced man, called Taylor.

"You know," Stanhope said, reminiscently, "he was on the train the day I came up here. He just poked his head in at the door of the car I was in, gave one look around and then vanished."

"Abruptly?" asked Stone, eagerly.

"Yes, decidedly abruptly. As if the sight of me scared him off!"

"But he didn't know you?"

"Oh, no, I was joking. But he really looked as if he had seen somebody that scared him off. He gave a comprehensive glance round at the passengers and then scooted. But I've looked him up more or

less, and I can't think he knew the Lawrences, though he is from Chicago."

"He's interesting to me for that reason," Stone said, meditatively. "Did you know any one else in the car?"

"No," Stanhope replied, "but there were three women who turned out to be boarders arriving at Gray Porches—"

"Who?"

"Those two maiden ladies, Miss Lowe and Miss Hemingway—and Mrs. Trent. There was also a very pretty girl, but she went on further. Those were the only ones I noticed at all, and that because they sat near me."

"H'm," Stone said, "did Taylor look toward any of those people you mention?"

"I can't say. As I saw him, he cast a roving glance that included everybody in sight, and then he disappeared."

"Precipitately?"

"Yes, I should call it that. If he had seen someone he wanted to avoid, I think he would have looked as he did. But that's likely my vivid imagination."

Dinner over, Stone walked back to the village through the pleasant twilight.

As he passed the hospital, he saw Mrs. Endicott and Mrs. Trent coming out. They carried empty

baskets, having evidently been there on an errand of beneficence.

He paused to speak to them, and found them both in an unnerved and tearful state.

“What is the matter?” he asked, sympathetically.

“We had a nerve-racking experience,” Mrs. Endicott said; “we visited two or three patients, and carried them flowers and jellies, and as we passed the room where that awful man is—that white-faced man, he screamed for us to come in. So we went in, and he immediately became violent—”

“Why, he isn’t insane, is he?” asked Stone.

“Not exactly,” Mrs. Trent informed him, “but he might as well be. He yelled at us like a crazy man!”

“What did he say?”

“Oh, he was awful!” Mrs. Endicott shuddered and held more firmly to Mrs. Trent’s arm, “he shook his fist in our very faces, and said, ‘you did it—you did it—’ and then he mumbled low—‘if you don’t tell I will—I will—’”

“Oh, hush,” begged Mrs. Trent, “that’s just the way he spoke! Oh, he was horrible! Why did we ever go there?”

“Come, come, now,” Stone said, cheerily, “he got on your nerves and I don’t wonder. He is a most unpleasant sort. You go on home, you two, and forget all about it. Don’t mull over it or it will

haunt your dreams. He isn't responsible, you know, and he is practically demented, though the doctors don't exactly admit it."

The two women went off, and Stone turned in at the hospital entrance. This poor, crazed thing might give him a hint.

He had no trouble in gaining admission to the room, and advanced toward the white-faced patient with a cheery good evening.

At sight of him, Taylor trembled violently, and seemed about to go into a convulsion.

"Go away, please," whispered the attendant, "you seem to excite him for some reason or other. He can't stand it."

Stone withdrew from sight, but secretly watched from the doorway.

"Who was that?" the sick man gasped.

"A friend," said the nurse, soothingly; "go to sleep now."

"Elaine," said the patient, "poor, poor Elaine."

CHAPTER XVII

WHO WAS ELAINE?

STONE stood a few minutes longer, listening to the mutterings of the man, himself out of sight.

He heard only broken and disjointed sentences, and repetitions of "Poor Elaine" and "she did it—I know she did it," as the sick man tossed restlessly about.

"What is the matter with him?" Stone asked the nurse after he had beckoned her out into the hall.

"He is an epileptic," she returned, "though not a chronic one. I mean, he may go for a long time without a seizure, and then some sudden shock or excitement will throw him into convulsions again. But he is suffering from a nervous breakdown too, and is in a pretty bad state."

"What's his name?" asked Stone, "his first name?"

"John," was the reply, and the detective went away.

He felt like one who has been given the scattered bits of a jig-sawed picture puzzle, and ordered to put them together. Only he felt that he hadn't all the bits, in fact, that he had very few of them. And it seemed to him that the most important bits were missing.

But he had one new one.

John Taylor! He was convinced that this white-faced man was in some way connected with the Woodbine tragedy, but he did not think, as yet, that he was the murderer. Surely that helpless, hopeless piece of humanity never could have conceived and carried out the rather elaborate plan of that murder.

For Stone still held to his first impression, that Miss Busby's "queer man" was the criminal.

But if John Taylor was mixed up in the affair in any way, then Stone was ready to think that he might be the J. T. of the wedding ring.

The detective hadn't yet fathomed the depths of this assumption, but that man haunted the undertaker's shop, he had gone to the cottage to look at the bodies, he was forever prowling round the vicinity, and, most important of all, he babbled of Elaine—poor Elaine.

Stone held that all those intertwined threads could not be the result of mere coincidence, there were too many of them. Elaine was an uncommon name, it was in one of Lawrence's books, it was on Taylor's tongue, it was the initial of a name in a ring and the other initials were his own.

It was hard for Stone to link up the beautiful Mrs. Sayre with this unlikely person, but, he reasoned, that the wedding ring was not her own—that is, not originally hers—bother that wedding ring,

anyway! He couldn't make it out! What a fearful puzzle this case was! He had never felt so utterly at a loss.

But the only thing to do was to keep on plodding in the hope of running up against some direct clue or enlightening circumstance.

He developed the finger print that he found on the pearl pin.

It resulted in a good, clear print, quite evidently a final touch, over a mass of blurred impressions.

Next, to trace the owner of the thumb that made it.

Stone went to luncheon at Gray Porches, and as he sat at the table with the Endicotts and the others, he told them of the print, without, however, saying where it had been found.

"And so," he said, "I have to take the finger prints of all of you—all the guests, I mean, so that I can get the prints of the servants more plausibly, for it was doubtless one of the servants who did this thing."

In the back of Stone's mind was a lurking suspicion of Ben Gray, and this was the way, he thought, to get at the truth.

So the prints were taken, the younger people looking on the matter as a lark, the elder ones, rather bored by it.

Mr. Endicott made strenuous objection to giving

up his own prints, saying it made him feel like a criminal. But his wife told him to behave himself, and the gentleman from Boston added his aristocratic finger tips to Stone's collection.

It was a tiresome job, and Stone called Lewis in to assist him in the mechanical part of it.

But the matter finished, the result was unmistakable.

The finger print on the pearl stickpin was that of Mrs. Trent.

"Which gets us nowhere!" said Stone disgustedly. "Of course, she didn't steal the pin, but she picked it up somewhere or some innocent matter like that. You'll see."

And, sure enough, when he questioned Mrs. Trent, she laughed mischievously, and said: "I've been waiting for you! Of course, that's my thumb print on the pearl. I was walking along the hall, on my way to join Mrs. Endicott for our walk, and the pin lay on the floor in the hall, just outside her door. I thought it was Mrs. Endicott's, and I stepped in her room and stuck it in her cushion. I meant to speak to her about it when I joined her, but she spoke of something else and the matter of the pin went out of my mind entirely. I didn't think it was a valuable pin at all, I thought it was an imitation pearl."

"Where was it?" Stone asked, thoughtfully.

"On the hall floor, just outside Mrs. Endicott's

door. The maid or whoever had it, must have dropped it there—that is, if it is the pin you are looking for. Are you sure it is? ”

“ Yes,” Stone said, shortly. He was disappointed, for aside from the clear, plain print of Mrs. Trent’s thumb, there were only faint and confused marks, which the superimposed print prevented him from identifying.

“ What is your first name, Mrs. Trent? ” Stone asked, abruptly.

“ Amanda, why? ” she stared at him.

“ What is Mrs. Endicott’s? ”

“ Ellen.”

“ Ellen! not Elaine? ”

“ No, Ellen, I’ve often seen it written. Why, Mr. Stone? ”

“ Nothing,” he smiled apologetically. “ I’m just trying to trace a name. Did you ever know anybody named Elaine? ”

“ Never. I’ve only seen the name in books.”

“ That’s just where I saw it, in a book.”

“ What book? Whose? ”

“ One of Mr. Lawrence’s,” said Stone, but he spoke absent-mindedly and lost interest in the conversation.

“ I say, Mrs. Trent,” he said, suddenly, and with a smile that was almost boyish, “ help me out, there’s a good fellow. You have more or less detective ability. I’ve noticed all the time we’ve been talking

about this case, you give me a bit of advice which way to look. Do you think for a minute that somebody in this house—not a servant—a man, could be implicated in that pearl pin theft? ”

“ Mr. Endicott? ” she gasped, looking horrified.

“ Oh, no, not Mr. Endicott.”

“ Then who? speak out—”

“ Well, Mr. Gray.”

“ Mr. Gray! No, I don’t think Mr. Gray could have taken it—”

“ He had opportunity—”

“ Who didn’t? You weren’t here, Mr. Stone, but that first morning, anybody could have ransacked that house, before the police came—”

“ But as a matter of fact, nobody was over there except Ben Gray.”

“ I don’t believe he took it—I’m sure he wouldn’t. I’d suspect the servants, or the police themselves before I’d suspect Mr. Gray.

“ Probably you’re right. It’s no clue, anyway, since the murderer didn’t take it.”

“ Who was the murderer? ”

“ That queer man Lizzie Busby saw.”

“ You seem very sure.”

“ I am sure. At first, I thought Miss Busby made that story up. Then I thought the man was Miss Busby herself. Now, I deem her innocent and I think the queer man was the murderer.”

“ But tell me, Mr. Stone, you have a sort of suspicion of that man in the hospital, haven’t you? ”

"I can't help feeling he's mixed up in the affair, somehow, but I can't think him a murderer, can you?"

"Why not, if he's in the mystery at all?"

"He's so weak—not only physically, but generally ineffective—"

"But they say he's an epileptic, and they are uncertain creatures. Sometimes they're almost super-humanly strong."

"You've had experience, then, I never have. Tell me more about the symptoms—or effects?"

Mrs. Trent turned away from him. "No," she said, "I never had any experience with them. All I know is hearsay."

She turned to a mirror and adjusted her hat, then said a smiling good afternoon to Stone, and went down the porch steps.

He watched her with that gaze of his that seemed to see everything and nothing.

A puff of wind came suddenly and blew off Mrs. Trent's hat.

With a bound, Stone was down steps and picking up the hat, brushing it off with coat sleeve, and looking at it solicitously.

"Oh, it isn't hurt," she smiled at him. "These sport hats will stand rough usage. I ought to use a hatpin, but I think it will stay on now."

She settled it firmly into place, and with a word of thanks for his courtesy she went on.

Stone drifted over to the Woodbine cottage. He was beginning to think that if he didn't get some

word from those photographs in Chicago, which was his last hope, he might have to give up the case.

At the bottom of his heart, he knew he'd never give it up, but he was very downhearted about it.

Over and over he said to himself, "E. R. from J. T."

Then he would add, Elaine Rowland from John Taylor, and then he would laugh at himself for a silly fool.

How could that be the right wording? If it were, how could those people link up with the case?

Well, he argued, if it was Mrs. Sayre's mother's ring—but that would make the Taylor man her father! Too preposterous!

Suppose then, it was the ring of Mr. Sayre's mother, but her husband's name couldn't have been Taylor—unless she married twice—no, that was all wild guessing. But the man was implicated—maybe a brother—ah, there was a way to look. Suppose the John Taylor in the hospital was a son of the John Taylor of the ring—no, that led nowhere.

Stone put it to himself. Did he or did he not suspect the hospital man of being the murderer?

He did not. But he did think that man was implicated, or at least knew more than he had told.

It was hopeless to go there and ask to talk to him, it would not be allowed. So he must think it out.

Now, the fact that the man babbled of Elaine, that his initials were in the ring on Mrs. Sayre's

finger, and that there was the name Elaine in one of Lawrence's books, were enough to connect White-face with the matter. He could not be eliminated.

And he had been among the first to call at the cottage after the murder; he had prowled about the vicinity ever since, and finally, he had screamed "you did it! you did it!" to the ladies who had called at the hospital.

Stone didn't take this to mean that he accused either Mrs. Endicott or Mrs. Trent, but was merely shrieking in delirium. Then he followed that up with "Poor Elaine," and a further "she did it."

Again, Stone did not think this meant Elaine did it—yet—well, if the man was speaking of the murder, at least, it indicated a woman did it.

But was he speaking of the murder?

Stone thought he was.

Stone thought the murderer was a woman.

Stone thought he knew which way to look for that woman.

But it was so astounding, so startling that he had to think it all over and over again before he could realize it.

"Straws show which way the wind blows," he said to himself, "but—" and then he chuckled and wound up his soliloquy by remarking silently, "It's an ill wind that blows nobody good."

Which proverbial wisdom was decidedly comforting to his perturbed mind.

"In that case," he mused starting up as at a new thought, "there's a very remarkable colored person in the woodpile: I'll hunt him out."

Over to Woodbine cottage he went again, and with a new idea in his brain, a new glint in his observant eye, he scanned the two bedrooms.

"Of course," he said, nodding confidently, "of course. Right. Certainly. Exactly so."

These satisfied comments were addressed to various articles of furniture and were accompanied by a dawning smile of understanding which grew continually more sure.

He paid especial attention to the chintz-covered armchairs in both rooms, even going so far as to thrust his hand down between their cushions and examine the bits of dust he extracted.

He ran over the books again, nodding his head as he noticed marked passages or pages worn by use.

He put his head out of the window, and seeing Emma Lily, as he had hoped to do, he called her over.

She came obediently, being used to these summons.

"I'm getting at the root of the matter," he announced, looking at her seriously. "Emma Lily, you know or suspect something you have never mentioned."

His gaze enlightened her, and she began to tremble violently.

"No equivocation now," he said, with positive sternness, "you must tell me. What did you see?"

They were in Lawrence's bedroom, and as Stone looked about the woman he questioned began to cry.

"Listen, Emma Lily," he spoke kindly, "you'll have to tell, sooner or later, since I'm getting wise to it. So tell me, as it will be easier than telling the police people."

"Well, it was only once—I saw her bedroom slipper in here."

"She might have dropped it off when she came in to say good night to her brother—"

"Yes—said Emma Lily," she might—I say she *might*—"

"Well, go on."

"Well, once, I heard him call her something—"

"What?"

"Oh, I don't know—something like sweetheart. But they were very fond of each other—"

"Yes," Stone said, dryly, "they were. Go on."

"Well, it was only a few times—and I might have been mistaken—I say, I might have been mistaken—"

"You were not mistaken. That's enough—for now, Emma Lily. Go along now, and don't open your mouth about this to anybody, you hear?"

"Yes, sir," and stifling her sobs, she stumbled blindly away.

Stone walked briskly down to the village, and went to the home of George Bailey, who had been Mr. Lawrence's chauffeur.

After a short but serious interview with him, Stone went up to Hazel Hill.

"I'm getting somewhere," he announced, as he and Hazelton senior and Dave Stanhope settled down for a talk. "But it's the last place I expected to get to."

"New developments?" asked Amos.

"Yes, and yet, well, I don't want to pat myself, but I suspected it from the first. But it was so preposterous, so diametrically opposed to all the evidence I could get hold of, that I laid the idea aside, but now, I've more than enough evidence to corroborate it fully."

"Tell it out," said Stanhope, all attention.

"Well, here it is in a nutshell. Did it never dawn on you that perhaps Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre were not brother and sister?"

"What?" Hazelton looked utterly bewildered, and Stanhope stared at Fleming Stone in dismay.

"That's the truth," Stone said. "I could scarce believe it myself at first, but now I've no doubt of it."

"What were they then?" exclaimed Amos, "married?"

"No," and Stone's eyes were pityingly sad, "they were lovers."

"No!" Amos almost shouted, "I won't believe it! That dear woman—that fine man—never!"

"Yes, it's true," Stone assured him. "But don't judge them too quickly nor too harshly. We don't

know what lay behind their wrecked lives, and, at least they have paid the price."

"Tell me all you know," said Amos, who was greatly moved.

"When I first began to investigate," Stone said, "I had a faint suspicion that they might not be brother and sister. But when everybody was so devoted to them, when there was no breath against them, when they seemed so simple and straightforward in their lives, I concluded I was wrong. So I worked away on the brother and sister theory. But things didn't fit. They were only little things, but like straws, they showed the way the wind blew."

"For instance?" asked Stanhope.

"Well, the very way Mrs. Sayre, as I was told, looked after her brother's comforts. Keeping his room so daintily fresh—flowers and all that—it seemed a little excessive for a sister's attention. Then their utter absorption in one another. They cared little for company, and were happy alone together, going off for all-day picnics, and sitting in each other's rooms."

"How did you know they did sit in each other's rooms?" said Dave.

"I noticed that almost the first thing. In each bedroom were two easy chairs, soft cushioned in chintz. They were, all four, equally worn and apparently much used. Now, unless they sat together, only one chair in each room would have been so

much worn. I don't mean worn out, but you can tell when a chair is much sat in. I deduced an unusual amount of time spent together for an ordinary brother and sister. But I learned that the community held that these two were not an ordinary brother and sister, but very affectionate as well as very superior, so I wavered again in my conclusions.

"Then, the books. That house is full of books of love poems, and romances. Why, on Mrs. Sayre's bedside table is a copy of the *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, the most lover-like book in the world. Now she can't read such things in devoted memory of her husband, for she has no picture or memento of him in the whole place. She certainly had no other lover, for her life seemed to be an open book to the whole village. So, that was indicative. Likewise, in his room were sentimental books; and yet, in no case trashy, or of a low grade of literature.

"In each room the only portrait was a photograph of the other—all very well for a brother and sister, but not usual, to say the least."

"Why, any brother and sister would have each other's picture—" Amos broke in.

"Yes, but they weren't brother and sister. I interviewed Emma Lily, and though she hated to do it, she acknowledged that she had seen some things that made her suspicious. She tried to ignore it, and did, but she had to own up. Once or twice it was Mrs. Sayre's bedroom slipper left in Lawrence's room—again he called her 'sweetheart.' Nothing

much, you will say, but the cumulation of these things points to the truth. Then I went to see Bailey, who was their chauffeur. He was reluctant to tell, but I made him own up that when he was driving them, he had sometimes seen in his mirror, actions, hand-clasps, or fond looks, that made him surmise there was a different relation between them than that of brother and sister."

"Oh, stop!" Hazelton cried. "I can't believe it—I don't want to believe it! That lovely woman—"

"Don't blame her unheard," Stone said, very gravely. "You don't know what she suffered, what she must have suffered from her anomalous position. The fear of discovery must have been always in her mind, the sorrow of the necessity for the double life—remember to whom much was forgiven because she loved much. Only a great and an overwhelming love could have brought about the circumstances."

"And Lawrence—he just adored her!"

"Of course he did—and she adored him. That's the crux of the situation. Now, they, of course, lived under assumed names—"

"Look here, Mr. Stone," Amos spoke sharply, "don't you go ahead on this assumption unless you are positive—unless you can prove what you say."

"I prove it to my own satisfaction by the word of Emma Lily and George Bailey," Stone answered, steadily. "They told me they had seen things and heard things which made it impossible to doubt that the pair were lovers. Now, since they forsook all

honor, all reputation, all family and friends to bury themselves in this little village and live for each other alone, shall we respect their secret and let the whole matter drop into oblivion—”

“No, a thousand times no!” cried Hazelton. “More than ever they must be avenged and their murderer sent to his doom.”

“Who is the murderer?” asked Stanhope, suddenly.

“Miss Busby’s queer man,” replied Stone, confidently. “I’ve never wavered from that decision. I thought at one time it might have been Miss Busby herself, but when I learned how she loved Lawrence, I knew she never could have killed him.”

“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned,” Amos said, sententiously.

“I know, and that’s why I thought Lizzie Busby might have reached the furthest fury. But I abandoned that idea.”

“That’s why Mrs. Sayre was so stand-offish,” Dave said, thoughtfully. “As a beautiful young widow, lots of the men here admired her, but though always kind and courteous, she favored none of them.”

“Lawrence too,” added Amos. “All the women in town set their caps for him, and he paid them no more attention than he paid Lizzie Busby. I guess you must be right, Mr. Stone.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE TRUTH AT LAST

BARKER HAZELTON came in just then, and the whole story was related to him.

To the surprise of the others, he did not seem amazed at the revelation.

"We suspected it," he finally admitted. "That night, you know, the night of the murder, Gladys went over there late, to see if she could help me about that foolish club business, and she saw them through the window, when she looked in. They were in each other's arms, and she knew it was no brotherly embrace!"

"But, embracing before an open window!" exclaimed Stanhope.

"It wasn't open," Barker said, "there was only a bit of a peephole beneath the drawn-down shade. Glad peeped in, because she wanted to see whether to go in or not, and when she saw that, she turned back and went straight home again. She told me about it next day, but she never told anyone else, not even her mother. And of course, I never said anything. But I thought it over a lot, and it explained a great many things. You see Mrs. Sayre was always so offish with Gladys' mother. Nice and

chummy—she didn't snub her because she was a dressmaker or anything like that, but she wouldn't talk about the war—although they were both war widows."

"Of course," Stone said, "both Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre were undoubtedly using assumed names. This opens up a wide field for conjecture. Also, of course, Nevin Lawrence is the name he has written under—at least, ever since he has been up here. Nobody knows whether he wrote before or not. Myself, I think he used to be an architect, for in his attic is a trunk full of really fine architectural books and prints. If he gave up architecture and took to writing stories, and changed his name and settled in this obscure village, it is probable that he considered himself fairly safe from discovery, as he, in fact was, until now."

"And then who killed him?" queried Barker, showing his excitement.

"Someone in his past life," Stone said, decidedly.

"I say," Barker cried, "is that what you wrote on that paper dad put in the safe?"

"Look and see," said Stone, smiling grimly.

Amos Hazelton produced the paper in question and read aloud:

"I surmise that the murdered man and woman are not brother and sister, but are lovers. And I

surmise that the murderer is someone who has been wronged or scorned by one or both of the victims."

"By jinks!" Barker exclaimed, "you hit it first clip, didn't you? You're a wonder, Mr. Stone."

"But I wavered from that conclusion several times," Stone admitted. "It didn't seem possible to get corroborative evidence. And my first thought of it was based only on the type of books they both affected, almost entirely books of deep and romantic sentiment."

"And only now you've found the corroboration?" asked Stanhope.

"Yes, only lately. I noticed particles of cigarette ashes and specks of tobacco in the crevices of both those arm chairs in Mr. Lawrence's room. I noticed two ash-trays in each room. Oh, everything in that house fairly cries aloud the occupancy of two people devotedly attached, and not a brother and sister, however affectionate.

"And I found out from Emma Lily, how Mrs. Sayre consulted Lawrence's tastes in food and cooking; in household ways and means; in everything his wishes were deferred to, and not with merely a sisterly good nature, but with the joyous slavery of a loving woman. It was this atmosphere of devotion everywhere that made it possible for me to abandon that brother and sister idea entirely. But now, our work is only begun. To find the murderer is no

easy task, though we now have a motive—that is, in a general way.”

“What do you mean?” asked Barker.

“Only that presumably the murder was committed by the man Mrs. Sayre forsook to run away with Lawrence, or the woman he forsook to run away with her. We can’t blink the fact that there was an obstacle to their marriage, either in the fact that he already had a wife or she a husband. Knowing the class of people they were, can we doubt they would have preferred to be decently married had it been possible. And what else could have prevented? They were not young enough to be under parental discipline—”

“Maybe she wasn’t married at all,” suggested Stanhope, “but he was. So she pretended she was a widow, for convention’s sake, and that’s why her wedding ring didn’t bear her own initials.”

“It may be,” said Stone, “but I think more likely she had been married, and that her ring bore the initials of her real name, which was not Janet Sayre, and never was Janet Lawrence.”

“What do you suppose it was?” asked Amos.

“Elaine Rowland,” said Stone, a little abstractedly.

“E. R. from J. T.,” said Stanhope, reminiscently. “Who was J. T.?”

“I don’t know,” Stone said, slowly, “but I can’t

help linking it up with John Taylor, your white-faced man."

"Of course!" Stanhope cried. "But, that horrible creature the husband of that lovely woman—"

"Why not? That might explain her running off with Lawrence—we must continue to call him that till we can find out his real name. No wonder my man in Chicago couldn't trace a photograph of Nevin Lawrence!"

"What a moil!" exclaimed Amos Hazelton. "Where are you going to begin to unravel it?"

"With the white-faced man, if I can get access to him. I've something to work on now, if I can get him in a quiet interval. If he's still ranting I sha'n't attempt it."

"Mrs. Sayre always said she didn't smoke," Barker said; "and she advised Gladys not to."

"That's not surprising," Stone said. "She built up a reputation for conservative, correct behavior. And if when alone with Lawrence, she wanted to smoke with him, it was merely for the mutual coziness of it. You see they had to be eternally on their guard before every one, neighbors, servants and all. Small wonder they were caught now and then. The chauffeur had many opportunities of catching them off guard, and once his suspicions were aroused, he would naturally watch them in the motor car mirror. But he was loyal to them, and never breathed their

secret. As also was Emma Lily, who adored them both."

"You don't think Miss Busby knew of it?"

"Oh, no. She never suspected, or she wouldn't have thrown herself at Lawrence's head as she did. Another thing. Lawrence had Mrs. Sayre's picture in his watch case. That is not usual for a brother."

"No," Stanhope assented. "Oh, I can have no further doubts. But where do you get the name Elaine Rowland?"

"Pure invention," Stone smiled. "I saw the words 'From Elaine' in a book of love sonnets in his room, and there was a very old silver spoon in the pantry marked Rowland. I just imagined Elaine was her name, and Rowland her own family name. Like as not I'm wrong about that. Only, when I spoke the name Elaine Rowland to Taylor, as he stood in Crouch's shop he gave a sharp scream and fell in a sudden convulsion."

"Then he knew the name, whether it was hers or not. Maybe it was the name of Lawrence's wife."

"Maybe it was. But I linked up that lover's book with his sweetheart rather than with his neglected wife."

"Pretty daring thing for them to do, come here and settle in a decent community," growled Amos Hazelton, who was beginning to resent the wrong.

"Now, dad," Barker said, "let the dead past bury its dead. They were always kind and courteous to us.

We're not the keepers of their morals, and anyway, they've gone to their final judgment."

"That's right boy. I'll say no more on that score. Now, Mr. Stone, can I do anything to help you? If not, I think I'll run up to the mountains and join my wife for a few days. I'd rather tell her all about this myself, than have her read it in the papers."

"No, thank you, Mr. Hazelton. If I need help, I'll gladly call on Stanhope here, or on Barker. You go ahead, and stay a while with Mrs. Hazelton."

"You see, Mr. Stone," Stanhope said, as he and the detective went back to the village, in one of the Hazelton cars, "John Taylor must have known Mrs. Sayre pretty well to have known of her broken wrist."

"I thought that at first," Stone returned, "but I realized that he could have learned of that from the doctor who examined the body. He would have noticed the break and might have mentioned it. Same way with the scar on her shoulder. Taylor's wail of 'her pretty white shoulder' or whatever it was may have been merely imaginative regret. I thought at first it indicated an intimate personal knowledge, he might even have been her husband, but now I see it may not be so. Of course, he could be her brother—or—but that's all conjecture. But one thing is certain, there is an Elaine Rowland, and Taylor knows her. So whether it is Mrs. Sayre's real name, or is some other identity, we must find out first of all."

They went to the hospital, hoping to find Taylor quiet and willing to talk.

But to their amazement, and Stone's deep chagrin, they were told that Taylor had disappeared.

"He got away secretly," detailed the nurse. "We never thought of guarding him, and he watched his chance, dressed and sneaked off. You see between the attacks he was practically a well man."

"Too well altogether!" growled Stone. "I'm utterly disgusted, Stanhope, at my own stupidity—my culpable carelessness. I might have known he'd do just that very thing! Now, we'll never find him. And he's the man we must have."

"Go to his home—where he stays, over in Beechfield," Stanhope suggested.

"He won't be there," said Stone, dejectedly.

They telephoned over, and learned that he was not there and hadn't been for two days. They didn't know where he was. Yes, all his belongings were there.

"Will you go over there, Stanhope, and give his things the once over? I've other things to attend to that won't keep."

"Willingly," said Dave, and set off at once on the errand.

Stone went to the express office.

"Will you tell me," he said, "what parcels were sent off and by whom on this date or very soon

after? ” He showed the dates of the few days following the murder.

But though the records were carefully exact, no parcel was listed that had the smallest interest for Fleming Stone.

He tried the post office.

But no record was kept of the consignees of the packages sent by parcel post.

Yet, some coaxing and cajolery, aided and abetted by some cash in hand brought about a remarkable quickening of the memory of the little old maid who was the postmistress, and Stone went away, elated, and made for the telegraph office.

Then he went back to Gray Porches.

He waited till supper time, and then, by dint of Emma Lily's assistance, he found opportunity to slip unobserved into one of the bedrooms and make a thorough if hasty search.

The lynx-eyed woman stood guard in the upper hall, ready to warn him if anyone came upstairs. But they were all at supper on the porches, and he had a clear sweep.

Into a bureau drawer he poked his inquisitive hand. Into a handbag, a suitcase, several boxes.

At last he found what seemed to please him, and opening a little jewel casket he took out a ring.

Calmly pocketing the trinket, he went nonchalantly downstairs and took his place at the table.

“Isn't it too bad,” Miss Lowe exclaimed, “Mrs.

Trent has to go down to the city on the night train! She had a letter and she has to start right off."

"That is too bad," said Stone. "No bad news, I trust." "No," Mrs. Trent said, looking worried. "My sister is sailing for Europe to-morrow morning, unexpectedly, and wants to see me before she leaves."

"Ah, yes," said Stone, pleasantly, "I have a friend sailing to-morrow too. What steamer is your sister's?"

"The—I really don't remember. I'm not sure she mentioned the name. I read the letter only hastily."

"Look it up," urged Stone. "If they're on the same boat, I'm sure your sister would like to know my friend—she's a charming woman."

"I will look it up after supper," Mrs. Trent returned, and Stone devoted his attention to his plate.

He finished his meal before the others, and excusing himself, he sauntered away, to smoke a cigar on another porch.

A few moments later, Emma Lily came to the table and handed a note to Mrs. Trent.

After reading it Mrs. Trent looked smilingly around her.

"I sha'n't have to go down to-night, after all," she said, "my sister has postponed sailing for a week."

Stone sauntered over to the Woodbine cottage. It was still daylight and he went round the house, col-

lecting the few clues he had found there at different times.

These were only the two silver spoons and the book marked "From Elaine."

Then he went downstairs.

Almost at that same moment, Emma Lily again approached Mrs. Trent. "You're wanted on the telephone, ma'am," she said, and then stood respectfully by, while Mrs. Trent answered the summons.

"Hello," she said.

And, after a moment, she exclaimed, "Oh, my heavens!" following the exclamation quickly with a little laugh and a taunting. "Don't you wish you knew?"

Another pause, and then Emma Lily heard her say, "well, laundry—if you must know."

"Yes, to Chicago, why not? Who are you anyway? Oh, a postal inspector. Well, it's all right, no matter if it is lost—it wasn't of very great value. No, I won't put in a claim."

Stone walked from the cottage over to Gray Porches again. It was getting dusk now, and as he went, he thought he saw a figure skulking under the trees, in the shadow of some shrubbery.

He deflected his course in that direction and was not oversurprised to see White-face himself, trembling as he shuffled about.

"Hullo," Stone said, cheerily, "now don't evaporate again. I want you, Mr. Taylor, and if you

won't come willingly, I'll hold you as a material witness."

"Now wait a minute," the man whined, "I want to see somebody in at Gray Porches. I want to see her alone."

"I know whom you mean," Stone said, "and you can see her, but you can't see her alone. See here, do you recognize this?"

He drew from his pocket a ring.

"Lord, yes, it's hers." He began to shake again, and Stone watched him warily.

"Come along Taylor," he said, "you hang onto yourself for an hour and then go to pieces if you want to. But do keep up for an hour. Here we'll go in the back way, and sneak up to my room and I'll give you a drink. Now, no shambling, walk upright."

The two men followed out Stone's programme; Stone snatched up a telegram that had been placed on his chiffonier in his absence, and then they went down stairs.

The young people were still on the porches, but the elders had come inside and were proposing a game of auction.

Stone told Emma Lily to find Ben Gray and fetch him in, and at the same moment, Lewis appeared at the front door.

The women in the living room looked up with

surprise as so many men entered at once, and Stone asked everybody to be seated.

He stationed himself at the door, and Lewis unostentatiously placed himself near the open French window.

"I am truly sorry," Stone said, and his voice told of his sincere grief, "but I have the painful duty before me of exposing the identity of the murderer of your neighbors next door."

He paused, and then said, "will it be necessary for me to call the name or does the criminal prefer to make a confession?"

All eyes turned on John Taylor, who sat on the edge of a chair, his cringing attitude and trembling hands proclaiming his agitation.

Had Stone not fortified him with a strong drink, he would have fallen to the floor.

Ben Gray clenched his fists and started toward the white-faced man but Stone restrained him.

"Don't make a mistake, Mr. Gray," he said, "Mr. Taylor is not the criminal."

A thrill of surprise ran through the assembly, and at that moment Dave Stanhope returned.

Seeing how matters stood he merely sank into a chair near the door and awaited developments.

"As there seems to be no confession forthcoming," Stone went on, slowly, "I will have to state the truth myself."

"It is said," he went on, "that Hell hath no fury

like a woman scorned, and this, truly the furthest fury known to the human heart, has in this instance led to murder."

Lizzie Busby, who was in the centre of the crowded room, opened wide eyes. Were they about to suspect her again? She had thought that was all over.

But with a sudden cry of despair, Mrs. Trent rose from her seat and said, "yes, I may as well confess. I did it. I killed my husband, Herbert Trent, whom you knew as Nevin Lawrence. I killed Elaine Taylor, who lived with him under the name of Janet Sayre."

She looked like an avenging goddess, her face flaming with wrath, her gray hair a little disordered, escaping from its net, her eyes darting vengeance as she sought to exculpate herself.

"Who wouldn't do it? Who among you wouldn't kill a husband who deserted you for a younger and more beautiful woman? For two years I searched for the guilty pair. For two years they hid from me up here in this secluded place and under false names.

"Love in a cottage! A Fool's Paradise! But I found them—and by Herbert's own carelessness. He was an architect, a good one, and he gave up his profession to run away with her. Then to support them he wrote stories. Ah, that was his undoing. For when I read a story of his—two months

ago, about Bœotia, and the Tanagra figurines found there, when I read the description of that place in Greece—where we had travelled together—I knew no hand but his could have written it. There were little allusions that only he and I could understand. It was foolish of him to do this, but everyone forgets sometimes, and when I read it, I laid my plans. I planned his death—not hers—if she had staid in her bed she would have been alive to-day. I did not want to kill her—but she came running at me, and fought like a tiger. I had to kill her or be killed by her. I tore off her wedding ring, the ring she had disgraced, she clutched for it, and I shot her. It was her life or mine, she would have gladly seen me in the chair!”

“That is all.” Mrs. Trent suddenly fell into a chair, almost collapsed. “He will tell you the rest, she pointed to Taylor, and as she lost consciousness Mr. and Mrs. Gray assisted her from the room.

“You are, of course, surprised to learn,” Stone went on, “that Mr. Lawrence and Mrs. Sayre, as you knew them, were not brother and sister. I have no right or reason to ask your clemency toward them, but I will remind you that though they broke the laws of God and man, they paid the price. Let him that is without sin cast the first stone.”

The women were weeping now, the men sat silent, and then John Taylor spoke :

“It was an awful thing for her to do, awful!” he jerked his head in the direction Mrs. Trent had

gone, "but she was the scorned woman and her fury knew no bounds. She was always like that. I've known her for years, and she was always revengeful and full of fury at any wrong done to her.

"I knew it was her work, right away. I saw it all. She planned it awful careful, she came here, bringing a pair of shoes her husband had left behind when he ran away with my wife. Likewise, his old hat and raincoat. I knew it all, and I've seen her since and she as good as admitted it. I tried to make her give me money to go away and not tell on her, but she wouldn't and now she's been found out. But she wasn't no wife for that man—her, twelve years older'n him, and of such different nature, well come to that, I wasn't the right husband for Elaine, either. We were all sorted out wrong. Elaine only married me because her father made her—but never mind about that. I forgive her, free and ample. But Mrs. Trent, she couldn't forgive Herbert, not if she suffered hell for a thousand years for killing him. Yes, it was the scorn that did it. She's a proud woman, and from the first, when Herbert began to admire Elaine, Amanda got restive right away.

"And those two fought against it! Yes, I'll give 'em credit for that. Elaine'd beg me to take her away where she'd never see Herbert again, and Herbert he fought like a man against doing anything wrong. But I guess it was too strong for 'em, they couldn't hold out against it, so they just gave in and

ran away. Well, there's the story. Me, I forgive my wife and—I hope you all do.”

The simplicity of the man was touching. He accepted his own inferiority, his wife's wrong doing, his friend's treachery, all with a spirit of gentle forgiveness that made his strange white face look almost glorified.

“I'll be going now,” he said; “I want to think things over by myself a little. If you want me I'll be right there, over Beechfield way.”

He shuffled away, and there was a silence.

Stone, nervously upset by the whole harrowing scene, whispered to Stanhope that he'd go back to Hazel Hill for the night with him. He could stand no more of the questions that he saw were imminent.

Lewis was in charge, so they started off.

Amos had gone to the mountains, but Barker was there, and the three sat down for a good-night smoke.

“Tell me a few missing links,” Stanhope said; “how did you come to suspect Mrs. Trent in the first place?”

“Two things,” Stone said, “that hair net you found, and which I couldn't tack on to anybody else, and the way she pulled her hat down on her head yesterday. It blew off and I picked it up for her. She laughed, said she had no hatpin, and pulled the hat down over her ears with exactly the same gesture Miss Busby had said the queer man used. You know

I thought that queer man was a woman all the time. Because of the big head. A man doesn't have such a big head as to be noticeable in a dim light, and so I felt it must be a woman concealing her hair.

"Then there were lots of other clues, as soon as I knew in which main direction to look. Mrs. Trent took the pearl stickpin—she doubtless considered it her property as her husband had owned it. Perhaps she gave it to him. She smashed the Tanagra figure in her fury, because it was a memento of their trip together to Boeotia, and she resented its presence in this other woman's house. Can't you imagine her fury at seeing all the pretty home appointments of the guilty pair, and realizing how she had been scorned?"

"Indeed, yes," declared Stanhope. "In one way I can't blame her—"

"Oh, now, now," cried Barker, "of course the guilty pair, as you call them, were guilty, but there are mitigating circumstances. Doubtless their great, deathless love, to their minds, glorified and sanctified the wrong they did. It isn't a unique case. How about George Eliot—"

"Never mind the ethics, now, Barker," Stanhope said. "That's a matter of opinion anyhow. Anything else, Stone?"

"A few things. Mrs. Trent had in her jewel box a ring set with a catseye exactly like her husband's. Probably he would have discarded his, but it was too tight to get off without a file, so I suppose he

just let it stay on. Mrs. Sayre's wedding ring was her own, of course. Fancy her being the wife of that Taylor. Yet he has a certain nobility of spirit after all."

"He never would have made any trouble for them," Barker put in. "I suppose he just came up here to spy on Mrs. Trent."

"Yes," Stanhope exclaimed. "That's why he stuck his head in the car that day, and then vanished. He saw her, and he didn't want her to see him."

"Yes, Stone agreed," and as soon as she learned that they were up here, doubtless from the editor of the magazine, she came up and engaged her room. That was two weeks earlier, Gray told me. They didn't see her, of course, then she came on the day appointed, brought those shoes and coat with her, and put that performance over like a general! Not one woman in a hundred could have pulled it off so successfully. If Miss Busby hadn't been awake, the whole story might never have come out. I got a telegram to-night from my man in Chicago saying that he had located that photograph of a young man as Herbert Trent, taken eighteen years ago, and of course, the baby picture and baby spoon were also his, kept as a souvenir by Elaine—"

Stone spoke the word gently, remembering the book of love sonnets. "Mrs. Trent began to get wind of how things were going and planned to make a getaway tonight," he went on, with a sigh. "But

I had to put the kibosh on that and sent her a little note by Emma Lily, telling her she couldn't put that over. Then I called her up on the telephone. I was only over in the cottage, and asked her what was in the bundle she sent off by parcel post the day after the murder. I found out at the post office that she did send one. I had Emma Lily watching her while I telephoned, and she nearly fell off the chair, then collected herself and said it was laundry! A wonderful woman! It was the disguise and the weapon!"

"What will become of her?" asked Barker, soberly.

"I don't know," Stone said. "I suppose she'll have to stand trial, but she'll never be convicted. The unwritten law will probably get her off."

"Well, the whole thing has served me a good turn," Barker said, his boyish soul ready to throw off thoughts of gloom for his own happiness. "Dad says I may marry Gladys. He says, this thing here has made his whole outlook different, and if I am sure I'm in love, I sha'n't be denied my choice. And I'm sure!" he added, nodding his head vigorously, "and dad, he's sure too. He took right to my little girl that day she came up here to see him. So we're engaged."

"All sorts of congratulations and good wishes, old man," cried Stanhope grasping his hand, and Fleming Stone added his sincere and cordial hopes for happiness.

THE END

